MY LADY PEGGY GOES TO TOWN

FRANCES AYMAR MATHEWS

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MY LADY PEGGY GOES TO TOWN

BY

FRANCES AYMAR MATHEWS

ILLUSTRATED BY
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ILLUSTRATIONS

Then Lady Peggy, laughing, humming such a gay snatch of a song, comes tripping down the stairs. *Frontispiece*

And Lady Peggy and her woman found themselves on the road to town. *Page 40*

"A touch, a hit!" cry all at once as a spurt of blood darts up the supposed Sir Robin's blade. *Page 68*

Two watched her as she came in on Beau Brummell's arm. *Page 112*

At the table sat Kennaston, inky-fingered, scribbling; eyes now rolling to the ceiling, now roving hither and yon. *Page 158*

The instant that Lady Peggy felt herself in the highwayman's saddle, she knew that her wrists had met their match. *Page 186*

"I am Sir Robin McTart! Who, the devil, are you?" *Page 278*

"Ah, Peggy, my adored one," says he, devouring her pale face with his happy eyes. *Page 336*

ENVOI

When gay postillions cracked their whips,
And gallants gemmed their chat with quips;
When patches nestled o'er sweet lips
At choc'late times; and, 'twixt the sips,
Fair Ladies gave their gossips tips;
Then, in Levantine gown and brooch,
My Lady Peggy took the coach,
For London Town!

In the which My Lady Peggy sends off her lover broken-hearted and promptly falls into a swoon.

Kennaston Castle lies in Surrey. The Earl of Exham is master of the picturesque old pile and of the estate, and decidedly the slave of the very considerable number of debts which were up to His Lordship's ears when he came of age, some four and fifty years ago, and by this time have reached almost to the crown of his head. He is also father to his son and heir, Kennaston of Kennaston, and to the heir's tall twin, My Lady Peggy.

My Lady Peggy at this particular moment sits a-swinging on the top branch of a plum tree at the foot of the kitchen garden whence she commands a tolerable view of the highway.

"Impertinent sun!" cries Peggy, shading her handsome eyes with her hand as she stares off along the dusty road. "How is't you dare shine when there's no fine gentleman a-comin' from the east; no gallant with disheveled locks, powdered shoulders, disordered mien, distracted looks, spurs a-digging into his beast, lips apart, heart beating like spent rabbit's, and 'Peggy, lovely Peggy,' the clapper to his eager tongue at every jolt of his saddle, every rut of his way? Go cloud yourself, I say! since Sir Percy tarries. I'd have the skies weep, even if I can't." A peal of merriest laughter concludes this sally, and an apronful of plums comes tumbling down all over the other young woman who stands under the tree in waiting on her mistress.

"Is His Lordship not yet in sight, My Lady?" asks this one.

"Nay! that is not he, Chockey, and whisk me! but when His Lordship does come, he'll find a very

sorry entertainment. I swear, as dad says, I'll not see him when he does appear, that will not I. Nay, shake not your head, girl. Is't not true that Lady Peggy had once a lover?"

"'Twere truer say a dozen of that sort of gentry, Madam," replies the buxom Chockey, as she sorts the plums, the best in her bonnet, the flaws over the wall where the chickens and hens cackle to the refuse.

"Well, well, twenty if you like! but one more favored than the rest? the properest sort of man at saddle, gun, line, wrestle, toast, song, or dance? honest, straightforward, beautiful, as dad says the angels are he saw painted on the walls at Rome. Speak I truth, eh, Chockey?"

"Madam, that you do."

"And this paragon so worshiped his Peggy as, when she went off a-three months since to visit her godmother in Kent, he vowed by all the saints in the calendar he'd scarce survive until her return. False or true, eh, Chockey?"

My Lady Peggy punctuated this query by an accurate aim and hit, on the top of her waiting woman's head, with an especially large plum.

"True, Madam," dodging the fruit, and still with an eye on the road.

"And then, back comes My Lady Peggy, cutting short her stay in Kent, where she had much pleasure, to tell the truth, in the society of a very fine young nobleman."

"Lawk, Madam! another?" interrupted the faithful Chockey.

"Another, Chock," vouchsafes her mistress. "Sweet, sweet Sir Robin McTart!"

"Oh, My Lady!" cries the girl, vainly endeavoring to conceal a smile.

"Aye, Chock," proceeds Peggy, "I say again, a sweet and most entrapping young man."

"Madam, a squint eye, a wry nose, an underlip that hangs, a pair of fox-teeth, and a chin that's gone a-huntin' for his throat!"

"Tut, tut! Chock," laughs Lady Peggy, leaning back in her leafy bower, "what's all that to a nimble wit, a galloping conversation, and a faithful heart?" Lady Peggy's tone is as light as the May breeze blowing her soft locks about her lovely blooming face, full of mockery, witchery,—and then a bit of a sigh, low as flowers' whispers, and

up with her drooped head higher than before, as in the half mannish tone her twinship and long playfellowship with her brother have given her, she adds curtly—

"D'ye see aught coming yet, Chock?"

"No, My Lady, not yet," answers the girl ruefully.

Peggy bites her lips until they hurt.

"As I was a-sayin', Chock, your mistress cuts short her visit, sends word to her lover she'll be home o'-Thursday, and, as I live! to-day's the Monday after, and him still on the way! See him!" Peggy's white teeth close tight, and her eyes flash, and her little hands clench. "Not I! Let him come now an' he goes again faster than he ever traveled. The vain coxcomb! the deceitful, cozening, graceless poppet! He'll ne'er set eyes on her he used to call his Peg again, or I die for't." And Peggy jumped to the ground.

"Madam! Madam!" exclaims Chockey, pointing joyfully to a cloud of dust far up the highway. "Look! Yonder comes Sir Percy! Don't I know? 'Ain't I watched his long roan any day this twelve month a-turnin' by the lodge?"

Lady Peggy seizes Chockey's arm, and runs breathless to the house; in, a-scrambling up the broad stairs to her chamber; a-pulling out of drawers from their chests; a-hunting of ribbons and fallals, combs, brushes, kerchiefs, perfumes, patches, powder, whatever else besides!

"Hurry, Chock, do my hair as he likes it!" urges Lady Peggy.

"Lawk, Madam! I thought you swore just now you'd never set eyes on Sir Percy again?"

"You thought! Bless you, Chock, never be a-wastin' your time a-thinking where a woman's concerned. When her heart steps up and lays hold the reins, the steed gallops to the goal; she's always time to think after she's acted."

"Yes, Madam," concurs Chockey, with a mental reservation back of her mouthful of pins. "There, My Lady, Your Ladyship's hair is lovely; your Levantine gown becomes you like a pheasant do its plumage, and your eyes is a-shinin' with love and—"

"Tut, girl! It's anger, wrath, temper,—so!" Peggy marches up and down before the mirror, tossing her lovely head. "Thus attired, Chock, a

lady can flout, deride, harass, and madden one of the opposite sex, as can she not do in cotton frock and fruit-stained apron. Give me my comfit box, I pray. Tell me how long Sir Percy now hath been cooling his heels in the drawing-room?"

"But little lacking the hour, Madam."

"Good! I'd keep him there until Thursday, an I could. Now go tell him I'll be with him presently."

Chockey went.

Lady Peggy stood at the door ajar; she heard the impatient footsteps of her lover below, but yet she tarried, tapping her high red heel on the sill.

"Lud!" cried she, "an I show no proper spirit, Percy's uncle'll have the right of it when he says of one he's never seen yet, 'She's a-hunting your bank-notes, boy! She's heiress to debts, Sir, and by my life, Sir! I'll never father-in-law her, so long as I'm above the sod, Sir!' Despicable old wretch! as if 'twere not Percy I adored, without a care if he have a farthing to his fortune, or a roof to his head!"

And then Chockey, her palm warm with a sovereign, came with a rush.

"My Lady!" cries she, "'f you could see Sir Percy! White as milk, tremblin', shakin', chatterin', a-begging and a-praying as you'll condescend to go to him inside of another hour!"

"White, said you Chock?"

The girl nods vehemently.

"Shaking?"

"Aye, Madam."

"Like to faint, think you?"

"Like to die, My Lady!"

Then Lady Peggy, laughing, humming such a gay snatch of a song, comes tripping down the stairs, pulling out her petticoats, stopping her lover's outstretched arms of eagerness with such a splendid curtsy as any Court lady might have envied.

Still laughing.—"Lud! Sir Percy! is't you?" amazed.

"Aye!" returns he, more amazed than she, and standing off with dropped arms. "Whom did you think it was?"

"Another. My woman's stupid, and when she described the gallant that she did, it matched a different sort of him than you, methinks. How-

ever, let's be civil; the crops are good, the game likely to be, later; the King in health,—prithee have a chair." And Peggy swept a second curtsy, motioning toward a seat.

"Peggy! Sweet lips! Joy of my soul, what's it? Not one warm word for him who only lives for thee? Who's counted every hour since he parted from you, eh?" The young man draws nearer to her, and bends upon his knee, venturing, as he does so, to take her hand in his.

"Since you spent your time a-counting the hours, Sir, pray you, how many hours have passed since in this same room we parted, now three months, three weeks, and a few days since?"

Sir Percy sprang to his feet.

"Zounds! Peggy, and you flout me so?"

"Zounds! Sir Percy, did not I write you—and very well you know writing's not my forte,—that I'd be home o'-Thursday?"

"Aye, but I never got it until this morning; then did I put spurs and leave my uncle in the lurch to fly to you."

"What, Sir! not get my letter? An idle, silly, and foolish excuse. I sent it by Bickers, and trust-

ier man ne'er breathed. He vowed me he'd put it in your hands."

"Peggy, believe whichever of the two you like; but, in mercy tell me! What kept you so long away? I've heard rumors of another. Eh, Peg, 'tis not true, swear me 'tis not true? Oh, by the hue of my visage must you know what jealous pangs have racked me!"

Lady Peggy nods her head maliciously.

"Jealous pangs, forsooth! and you thought to medicine them, I dare be sworn, with vaulting the country over in the wake of Lady Diana Weston, the greatest heiress in the market! Bah, Sir, and you've heard rumors! I'll match 'em. I've seen the minx from afar. She is handsome, Sir; your taste does you credit."

"Peg, I swear 'twas but to please my uncle!" cries Sir Percy.

"Aye, and so displease me!"

"Nay, you know too well that I'll never do that of my will; but my uncle, as I've told you, must be coaxed, and then when once I gain his consent to seeing you, our battle's won. To see thee, Peg

's to worship thee! Lord Gower'll kneel when he beholds thee!"

"Our me no ours, Sir!" returned Peggy. "Let's here and now make an end on't all. You go pound the roads after your new mistress with her acres and notes, and I—"

"Well, you what?" asks the young man impetuously and yet with a certain grave dignity.

"Oh, I'll acquit myself to a certainty with one that's faithful as the sun, and gallant from his head to his heels."

"What's his name?" inquires Sir Percy in a hard, strained voice. "If he's a better man, Peg, and you can say you love him—God keep me!"

"His name's a very honorable and ancient one, he's Sir Robin McTart, twenty-third Baronet!"

"Peggy!"

If a thunderbolt had fallen betwixt Peggy's red shoes and his brown ones, Percy could not have been more astounded.

"Well, Sir?" returns she, scarce controlling the twitching of her lips.

"A milk-sop, molly-coddle! Oh Peggy, an you drop me, take a better man! Peg, you're a-joking.

Not that bumpkin! I've never seen him, but report has it he's afeard if one of his own dogs looks him in the eye and bays!"

"Sir Percy, have you finished?" inquires Peggy with dignity.

"No, have I not! By my soul, Peg, an you pitch me to hell for that jackanapes, I'll go to hell as fast as wine and dice, and cards and brawls, and usurers, and all that sort of crew can carry me! I'll up to London, and one morning when your brother sends you word he's found me with a rapier stuck in my throat, my pockets empty, and 'Peggy' writ on the scrap o' paper a-lying over my heart, then you'll believe Percy loved you!"

"Lud, Sir! Men are apt at such chatter, and a fortnight after, the vicar's a-publishing their banns with the other lady!"

"Peg!" He takes her kerchief end, as it droops away from her pretty long throat, in his fingers; he looks down deep into her eyes; his voice shakes, so does his hand.

"Whatever betides, my bonny sweetheart, there's only one that'll ever have banns read with me, and that's—" He takes her by surprise and by the

shoulders, and squares her to the mirror in its niche.

"Farewell, Peg—since you send me, it's the devil and dice, for by the Lord! I can't live a quiet life lacking your smiles."

In two minutes more Chockey, from the upper window, saw the long roan flying away from Kennaston faster than she ever galloped to it; and went down to find her young mistress a-lying prone in a fine wrinkled heap of silken gown, lace frills and furbelows, on the threadbare carpet of the big drawing-room.

To rush across the wide hall to the dining-room, seize a game-knife, back again; cut her mistress's stays; pour a glass of cider down Lady Peggy's throat, willy-nilly; clap her palms; pound her back; set her on her feet; and half carry her to her chamber, occupied not many minutes for stout Chockey.

"Lawk, My Lady," said she, surveying the prostrate form on the couch, arms a-kimbo, eyes saucer-wide, "who'd ever have thought to see your haughty Ladyship so mauled for the sake of any gentleman as lives!"

Lady Peggy lay still, but presently, from the depths of the pillows she spoke.

"I ain't mauled, Chock, not I!" Her Ladyship now sat up and stared around the big room. "It's only for sorrow for havin' had to disappoint Sir Percy, on account of dear Sir Robin."

"Oh!" ejaculates the worthy Chockey in a tone of undisguised and sarcastic disbelief.

"Chockey!" exclaimed her mistress in the tone of a drill sergeant, now rising to her feet.

"Lawk! My Lady, I didn't mean nothin'."

"Chockey," echoes Lady Peggy faintly, sinking to her knees, "whatever'll I do? Oh Chock! Chock! and Sir Percy just the centre of my heart, and me to behave to him like a brute! Out of my sight, away with you! There's the first bell a-ringin' for dinner. Say to daddy I'm too deep in my hand-writin' lessons to eat to-day! Say to him I'm gone out to break the new colt and not got back. Say to him I'm gone to the devil!"

And Lady Peggy fell a-weeping with such violence as Chockey had never seen; and, being a wise damsel, she left her mistress alone and went

down to soothe the gouty Earl, tied to his chair, as best she could for the absence of his daughter Peg from dinner.

II

In the which Her Ladyship wheedles her noble father and makes up her mind.

The Earl forsooth was a testy gentleman, and his girl was his plague and his pride; on her, rather than on his heir, the old man's fancy was set, for the reason that Kennaston, disclaiming all the country sports, the half wild outdoor life, the lusty joys and racing bumps and cups that had been vastly helpful in reducing the little his parent had started his career with, had elected instead to try his luck at that most inscrutable, vile trade of scribbling!

Peg's twin, her fellow in height and build, which made a slender youth of him indeed, had gone up to London quill-armed, ink-fingered, brain-pos-

sessed with rhymes; empty-pursed, determined to carve with such unlikely weapons as that apt bird, the goose, furnishes, a fame and fortune for himself, that should dazzle the world and recoup the fortunes of his well-nigh fallen house.

While the Earl jeered, Peg, herself scarce able to spell a two-syllabled word, looked up to her brother as nothing short of whatever stood in her mind for Shakespeare; for, low be it spoke, the fair Peggy had small notion of books, their makers or their pleasurable usage. To her they represented waste time almost, and only as a means of communication with Kennaston did she, since his absence began, pore daily over a dictionary, a speller, and a copy-book.

So sat she now, a couple of months after the parting betwixt her and Sir Percy; lips pursed, brows knit, goose-feather in finger, poring over a blank sheet of paper first, and from it turning to the closely-writ page of a letter from her twin.

Chockey sat on a stool hard by,—they were both in the buttery, for Lady Peggy was apt with all the mysteries of housekeeping, and had as fine a churning, as big cheeses, as fat chickens, as nice

eggs, as good hams as any other in the county,—had she not, the Earl, her father, had lacked something or all of his comfort. Chockey, then, sat working butter, squeezing all the white milky bubbles back and forth in the wooden bowl, and printing the pats in the trays, while her mistress sighed, swallowed, and at last burst forth in speech.

"Chockey, I shall fall into a fit, an I've ever another letter to write in this world. The last I writ was for Sir Robin to introduce him to Lord Kennaston when he should go up to town—and belike, I forgot to give it to him as I promised and have it safe here. It took me a week to finish, and I've copied all the words out of it I can, yet do I lack thousands more, methinks, to say what I would to my brother. Lud! Learning's a wonderful thing! Look at that, Chock!"

Lady Peggy holds up the well covered pages of Kennaston's letter before the eyes of the Abigail.

"Aye, Madam," giggles this one, "it has the air to me of where spiders has been a-fightin'! Now, for true, My Lady, do it say words as has a meanin'?"

"Listen," replies the mistress, reading off quite

glibly, since 'tis the one hundredth time since she got it that she's rehearsed the same to herself.

"Sweet Sister Peggy: I'd have written before but that literature pays ill until a man hath contrived by preference and patronage, the rather than by his wits, to place himself at evens with the Great and the Distinguished. So far I find Fame's hill hard in the Climbing, but do I not complain, for there's that spirit reigning in my breast as bids me welcome Poverty, even Starvation, lead it but to the sometime recognition of my Talents. I take up my pen not to riddle your ears with plaints, but on another matter, which is Sir Percy."

Lady Peggy's head droops a bit to match her voice, whilst Chockey's bright little eyes sparkle, and she twists the yellow butter into heart shapes as she pricks her ears and sighs.

"Sir Percy," continues My Lady Peggy, reading, "as you know came up to town, now these seven weeks agone, straight as a die to my meagre chambers, where welcome was spelled, I can assure thee, all over the bare floor, barer board, and barer master thereof,—for of a truth I love him as should

I the brother I had hoped he'd be! Peg, what's this thou'st done to the lad? Thrown him, a gallant with as big a heart as God ever made, over into the Devil's own mire, for sake of that little tow-haired sprat, Robin McTart! with his pate full of himself and none other,—so I've heard say, for never set I eyes upon the blackguard from Kent! Zounds! twin! What are ye women made of? And I write to say Percy, what with carousals and brawls, and drink and fights, and all night at the gaming-table, and all day God knows where, 's fast a-throwing himself piecemeal into the grave he's a-digging daily for your cruel sake. Could you but see him! A ghost! Wan, with eyes full of blood-spots, and hair unkempt! Madam, there's love for you—and love's what ladies like. Go match him, Sister, with McTart if you can, but twin me no more ever again an you and I wear black ribbons for Percy de Bohun!"

Lady Peggy's lip quivers; so does Chockey's.

"Lawk, My Lady!" cries the girl, splashing tears into the butter, reckless.

"'Black ribbons,' Chock! 'A ghost,' Chock! 'Mc-

Tart,' Chock! Lord ha' mercy! What's to become o' me?" Peggy's tears smart her eyes as she flings the goose-quill over to a cheese on the shelf, where it sticks, and one day surprises the Vicar at his supper.

"Get out of my sight!" she flings after it. "I can't write! Who can write out her heart and soul, when it's devilish hard even to speak it. Oh! Would I were my brother for one fine half-hour!" cries Peggy, rising and stamping up and down the stone floor of the buttery.

"An' if you were, Madam?" asks Chockey meekly, "what then?"

"I'd swear! Yea, would I! Such a lot of splendid oaths as'd ease my mind and let me hear from my own lips what a fool's part I'd played with my own—my adored Percy! Could I but see him! as Kennaston says." Peggy in her progress now upsets a pan of cream, and has genuine pleasure in splashing it about over her slippers as she speaks.

"But I! What am I? A girl! swaddled in petticoats and fallals; tethered to an apron, and a besom, and a harpsichord, and a needle,—yet can I snap a rapier, fire a pistol, jump a ditch, land a

fish, for my brother taught me. Still it's girl! girl! sit by the fire and spin! dawdle! dally!" The cream now spots up as far as Peggy's chin and flecks its dimple.

"Stop-at-home, nor stir-abroad! Smile, ogle!" each word emphasized with heel and toe.

"And—" Lady Peggy now flops back into her chair, breathless, "wait on man's will and whims,—that, Chock, 's what 'tis to be a woman."

"Aye, 'tis," assents the waiting woman. "But yet, My Lady, if I dared make bold, there's summat Your Ladyship might do, an My Lady, Your Ladyship's mother, came back home again from her visit to your uncle in York."

"Out with it!" says Peggy hopelessly, folding up her attempted letter and tucking it in her reticule.

"Mayhap you could persuade, by much weeping and praying, falling into swoons and such like, that Her Ladyship would take you up to London! Once there, Sir Percy couldn't keep his distance from you."

Peggy looks at Chockey as if she were a vision

sent from on high; then, quickly succeeding derision curls her lip.

"My Lady mother take a squealing chit like me up to town! Never! She'd say my manners weren't fit, or my figger, or my wardrobe. Lud! Chock! Bethink thee, lass, of my gowns in London town! and me no more acquainted with the ways yonder, than our Brindle is with the family pew!"

Lady Peggy walked out into the paddock, rubbed the cream from her slippers on the turf; caressed the ponies; munched the sweet cake she had in her apron-pocket, felt the keen sweet air blow over her hot forehead, and saw, dancing ever before her mind's eye, that insidious sweet suggestion of "going up to London."

How did one go up to London?

In the coach: aye to be sure; and the coach left the "Mermaid" in the village every Tuesday and Thursday at five in the morning. The coach! The splendid coach, a-swinging on its springs like a gigantic cradle; the postillions a-snapping their whips, the coachman a-cracking his long lash and a-shouting "All h'up for London!" and the ladies

and gentlemen—well armed, these last, in dread of the highwaymen on the heath—all a-piling in and a-settling themselves; and the guards a-tooting their horns, the landlady and the boots and the maids and the hostlers all a-bowing and a-scraping and—off they go! for London town—where Percy was a-pining and a-dying for her, so her twin writ in his letter.

Well, Lady Peggy went in, clapt on a fresh gown and shoes, and never was daughter more tender and patient with crabbed, gouty, crusty dad than she all through that lovely day. Playing back-gammon; spelling out the newspaper; trouncing the cat when it jumped on His Lordship's leg; blowing the fire; wheeling his chair from hither to yon; stroking the bald head; combing the white whiskers; and finally said she,

"Daddy, London's a very big sort of a place, now, isn't it?"

The Earl nods, coddling his leg into the slip of sunshine that's walking westerly away from him.

"My brother lodges, so he says, at the corner of Holywell Road and Lark Lane; tell me, dad,

where should that be now?" Lady Peggy has a careless air, and flecks a buzzing fly out of His Lordship's bowl of porridge.

"Eh?" pursues she, "is't for instance, in the city, or nigh London Bridge, or where the quality lives, or toward Southwark, or where?"

"Rot me!" cries His Lordship, looking up at his daughter in surprise, "what's my poppet got into her pretty head now, forsooth? Tut, tut, girl, what's town to thee, or its bearings? hey? stick thy eye into thy churn an' keep thy hand on the dasher,—'twere better'n all the shops in Piccadilly, or all the fops at Court."

"Slow, dad! I was only askin' of my twin's whereabouts. Shops and fops are not dizzyin' your Peggy, you may swear; 'tis my brother, Sir, of whom I'd learn!"

"'Twere better chase the scoundrel out'n my head, Peg, than hammer him in! A lad with every chance here in the county to raise his house, and make a good match with a nice plump girl, havin' land joining his own; but no! Up and off to town to starve and scratch!"

The Earl pommels the floor with his stick, causing the cat to leap into the air.

"Let him die in want! Let him freeze, thirst, come to the gallows, say I! For such as leaves plenty to pursue want, gets no sympathy from me!"

"He ain't begged for't yet, dad," says Peggy very mildly. "All I was a-wonderin' was this: When my brother took the coach at the Mermaid that mornin' you mind? how far off the inn where he alighted was the lodgin' at the corner of Holywell Road and Lark Lane?—eh, dad? Surely"—and here Lady Peggy knelt and stroked his lordship's gouty member, and her voice positively trembled, doubtless with excess of filial zeal and devotion.

"Surely," resumed she, "you, who were, I dare be sworn"—such arch eyes as Lady Peggy now made!—"a fine gallant not so many years ago, must remember that,—don't you?"

"Let's see, let's see," responds His Lordship, rubbing his head. "They set ye down at the King's Ārms, nigh the Bridge, Southwark Bridge, yes; Well! Damme! I ought to know! Lark Lane?

A devil of a hole; why, girl! it's not a quarter hour's trot from the inn, but it's a beastly environment. Gad! that son of mine chooses pens, ink and writing-paper there, rather than—"

"Lady Belinda here, weight fourteen stone; acres two thousand; guineas, countless; temper, amazin'; years, untold! ha! ha! ha! Oh, daddy!" Lady Peggy springs up and dances about a minute in most genuine gaiety, then she seizes her father's head between her palms and hugs and kisses him with much grateful warmth; then flops down a-coddling of the gout again; laughing, giggling, pinching puss, and saying,—

"Daddy, drop London! Care I no more for't. Know I quite enough. Let's chat of aught else in the world, until you fall a-napping, which will be soon now, guessing by the shadows."

'Twas very soon.

Then Lady Peggy tiptoed off to her chamber; then she pulled the rope that rang in the kitchen, and presently Chockey came, chopper and bowl in hand, checkered apron over white one; for serving maids were scarce in Kennaston Hall, footmen there were none; butler there was when he

was not doing t'other half his duty at the stables.

"Come hither, Chockey," says her mistress in a whisper, with a beckon. "Shut the door; go on with choppin' your leeks and carrots, cook'll want 'em for the soup,—but listen, Chock; unlock your ears Jane Chockey, as never you did before in your life."

Chockey bobs as she chops, leaning against the headpost, for support of her occupation, and also of her curiosity.

"You know my mother's box, the small one that was re-covered last spring with the skin of the red calf that died natural? Bickers put it on with a gross of brass nails?"

Chockey again bobs.

"Put into it," continues Lady Peggy, "a change of linen for yourself and me, two night-rails," Chockey's eyes dilate, "my gray taffeta gown with the flowered petticoat, my green hood and kerchief; powder, patch-box, lavender, musk, pins, needles; my red silken hose; your Sunday cap and sleeves" —Chockey's chopper ceases to work, and the bedpost creaks. "All of which," continues her mistress, "is but prelude to saying: 'I'm going up to

London by to-morrow's coach, and I'm takin' you with me!'"

"Madam!" Down goes the bowl, leeks, carrots, chopper and all a-spilling over the floor.

"Aye," says Peggy calmly, "gather up thy mess, Chock, and to work with the duds. Lay out my Levantine gown, my blue kerchief, my black silk hose, my brown cloak; and, from my mother's press, take the thick fall of Brussels lace and the brown bonnet it's tied to, and bring 'em hither; put them under the bed beside thy trundle so's my father'll not see 'em when he stops to bid me good-night. Borrow cook's hat she bought at the Fair when she was young, and her delaine veil for thyself; for, so appareled as not to be recognized, will you, dear Chock, and my Lady Peggy take the coach on April the twelfth. But, Chock, remember, mum's the word, an you let your tongue wag to my undoing, but the thousandth part of a syllable, your mistress and you part company forever! Go."

Chockey picked up Lady Peggy's waving hand between a pinch of her apron, lest her onion-smelling fingers should foul so dainty a morsel,

kissed it, and off and obeyed, speechless from surprise and veneration, both.

At night's fall,—the Earl, somnolent again from fire's warmth and the port he would take, despite the surgeon's orders to the contrary,—Lady Peggy, Chockey in her wake, purse in hand, went scouting through the kitchen-garden, the paddocks, the cowyard to the stable where Bickers's pipe shone in the gloaming like a fire-gem as he dodged and lurched after a refractory colt.

Bickers, albeit sometimes the slave of beer, was all times Lady Peggy's abject, and it took no effort nor persuasion to gain him to her will. He took his orders amiably,—they were to secure two places in the London mail for to-morrow morning, and strictly to hold his peace both now and forever about the whole concern.

Peggy gave him the price of the seats and with wise Castle-mistress foresight, she showed Bickers a sovereign beside.

"And Bickers," said Lady Peggy, "considering that the devil walks abroad often in the Mermaid's tap-room, I am told, I'll keep the sovereign for you 'til you come back, lest he rob you of it, eh?"

"Well, My Lady," said Bickers; "a whole sovereign, My Lady, ain't often seen out of the quality's pockets, and the devil might think I'd stole it, My Lady, and try to get it from me. Keep it, My Lady, keep it!"

With which the old man, having conquered the colt, set off for the village by a side-path all too well known to his tread. Presently by the spark in his pipe-bowl the two women saw that he had turned back; that, as he came close to them, he clapped his thumb over the glow, and,

"My Lady Peggy," mumbled he sheepishly.

"Whatever is't, Bickers?" cries his mistress in alarm.

"Naught to fright ye, My Lady, only it's been on my mind these many days to tell you as the letter you sent me with to Sir Percy de Bohun—"

"Well, well?" Lady Peggy's words came with a gasp, as the old man dead stops.

"Go on Bickers, I say!" the mistress's foot stamps with a thud on the damp earth.

"Askin' Your Ladyship's parding, the devil caught me that time at the Kennaston Arms, My

Lady, and he clawed that tight, My Lady, that I couldn't stir, and—and—"

Peggy now stooped, seized a billet of wood as big as her arm and gave Bickers a sound drub across his hands. The pipe fell in bits, the ash glowed; Bickers jumped, so did Chockey.

"'And, and' what?" drubbed Peggy with a will. "Not so much as ha' penny of the sovereign, unless you out with the whole truth!"

"I will! I will!" cried the old man. "Sir Percy never got the letter, My Lady, until the very day I seen him on the long roan a-ridin' for's life away from the Castle yonder," and Bickers jerked his thumb toward the house as he now made off.

The devil did not catch Bickers that night; he earned his sovereign before the moon rose.

As he sped, Lady Peggy took Chockey's proffered arm.

"You see, Chock, you see, how we that are born to wear petticoats are no better'n puppets! a-dancin' and a-cryin'; or a-kneelin' and a-weepin', as it happens to suit the whim of what, Chock? Who, Chock? Tell me, Chock!" cries Lady Peggy excitedly.

"Lawk, My Lady, that can I not!"

"A man, Chock, a man! it's a him that pulls the strings, girl, and all we've to do is to simper and jerk this way, that way. To think," here Peggy's voice falters, for they've gained the house and are clambering the back stairs in the dark. "To think that Bickers, Bickers! should ha' made me treat my worshiped Percy like a hog! Yes, Chockey, like a hog! even that name ain't vile enough for me. But, oh, an I reach London in safety, and gain my brother's chambers, and learn from him that 'tis for very love of me Sir Percy's canterin' to perdition, then, Chock, Lady Peggy'll know how to spell paradise for him she's riskin' much to hear the truth about."

"But, My Lady," ventures Chockey, who, notwithstanding the blissful prospect of seeing London, still had a practical eye toward the dangers that beset the path, both thereto, and once there.

"But, My Lady, supposin' we can't find Lord Kennaston's lodgin's; supposin' he's away from home when we get there; or, a-havin' a party, or ain't got no place for us to sleep; or suppose—"

"Suppose me no supposes, Chock!" Lady Peggy

shakes out the Levantine gown from its wrinkles. "If London were the black pit, and an army of Satans a-sittin' grinnin' around the brim, still would I go and find out for myself if it's for me he pines—or, if Lady Diana Weston is up in London too!" With which Her Ladyship gives the petticoat, she takes from its peg against the morrow, a somewhat emphatic, not to say malicious shake.

III

Wherein is recounted how Her Ladyship set forth, accompanied by her faithful woman, for London Town.

Whoever knows the rare delights of an English dawn nowadays can figure for himself, to the letter, how 'twas when Lady Peggy and Chockey, after a make-haste toilet in the dark, slipped out into the sweetness that long-ago spring morning. The mists were rolling and creeping slowly back and over from the river-meadows; the brawl of the stream tinkled in their ears; the scents of the flower-garden next the court-yard of the Castle, came potently, lured by the flush that by now was tingeing all the pallid east with rose; the yellow moon hung low to her setting, and two stars for handmaidens still shone, of all her million troupe,

at either side the disk; yonder, the steeple of the church pricked up to heaven; hither, the oaks, greening to their full leafage; there a brown rabbit scurried across the road; here the rooks hopped and ha-ha-ed to their fellows. Else, 'twas all a-hush with that recurring fond expectancy of hope, with which every day of every year so waits and wonders for "to-morrow" to be born.

Lady Peggy took the lead, kirtle high upheld, shoes soon bedrabbled in the dust and dew. Chockey, bearing the newly-covered box in her stout arms, followed close at heel. Both women, veiled double, and being wholly unused to such matters, sighting the path much the worse for the covering; in fact Peggy stumbled along like some old crone, and yet laughed under her breath merrily back at floundering Chockey.

"Hist! Chock, had I now but brought dad's cane and snuff-box, I must sure be taken for some three-score dame come yawning out of bed before her hour, to overtake, mayhap, a recreant grandson! Zounds! as my twin'd say, were he here," and hauling at the mischievous Brussels veil, down

flopped Her Ladyship, on her knees betwixt two villainous ruts.

"Oh, My Lady!" moaned the waiting-woman panting under cook's delaine and the calf-skin box. "Lord ha' mercy! an this be the way to London. I'd liefer be sittin' in the kitchen chimney a-blessin' my porridge and spoonin' of't, than this!" assisting her mistress to her feet.

"Fie upon thee, Chock! Remember you're waiting-woman now to a lady of fashion, to wit myself, and well used to journeys up to town in coaches every season! Lud!" Here Peggy stood in a puddle to take breath. "I wonder if we'll ever pass muster at the inn; and yet I'm sure, landlord, or dame, or hostler'd never think o' me."

"Haste, Madam," returns Chockey, "for do not forget the coach starts at five on the stroke, and we've still the quarter-mile to go."

So on they went. My Lady Peggy unable to restrain, from time to time, however, the keen relishful overflow of her spirits. When one's young and not ailing, a new day whips the blood and brain to such a pinnacle of unquestioning gladness as breaks bonds, be they never so weighty, and,

pro tem., sweet few-years comrades him with the happiness of earth and air and sky.

But once the curl of cheerful smoke from the "Mermaid" chimney full in view above the oak-tops, My Lady sobered much, and, clutching Chockey's arm, both fell a-trembling; stood stock-still, and stared into each other's eyes, as lace and wool would let.

"Lady Peggy," cries Chockey, "an it please Your Ladyship," with tell-tale gasps of throat, "let's go back home!"

"Jane Chockey!" answered her mistress, only needing this spur to set her a-panting the more to her purpose, "we'll go on."

And on they went. Peggy with a measured tread; Chockey plodding after. Into the inn-yard, where even now the great coach with its four bays waited the signal to start.

The passengers were piling on; and, atop already, quipped a trio of college lads in beavers. There stood mine host and hostess, maids, men, boys, cooks, and scullions; tips were tossed, baggage packed in the boot; farewells spoken; candles held

high, lashes cracked; prancing, pawing; a rattle, a door-bang, curtsies, bows,—

"All h'up for the London mail!" shouted the coachman merrily.

And Lady Peggy and her woman, neatly sandwiched between a fat, fussy dowager and a swearing, tearing old gentleman who together absorbed the most of the vehicle and all the attention of their fellow passengers, found themselves on the road to town.

No one paid the least heed to them, save that, at the stops, the guard came civilly to ask Chockey if her mistress required any refreshment, to the which Chockey, well prepared, always answered "no"; since, to raise their veils might betray their identity. So 'twas in hunger, silence and oblivion that the momentous journey was taken.

When they crossed the heath, the testy old gentleman did turn toward Peggy, thereby flattening her the more, and, pulling out a brace of pistols, said:

"Have no fears, Madam, I've traveled this road these sixty years, probably you have yourself"—

thus paying tribute to Peggy's now trembling agitation, which he pleasantly mistook for age.

"And the damned rascals, Madam, know better'n to attack the coach when I'm aboard. You're not in fear?" now bending a pair of sharp old eyes on the Brussels lace.

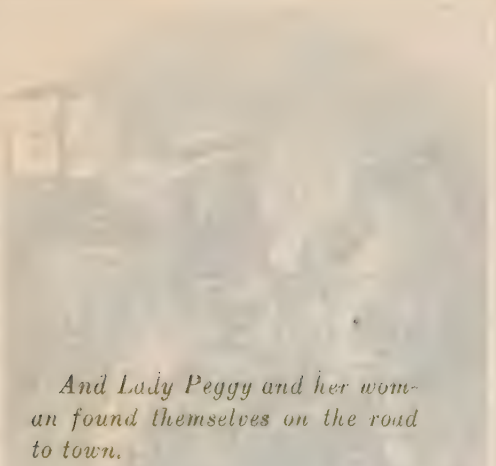
Lady Peggy, smothering her laughter, and recalling how often, half-a-score years ago, she's sat on this old gentleman's knee (he was a friend of her father's), puts hand to ear, and nudges Chockey behind the broad back of the dowager.

The old gentleman nods comprehendingly, turns square to Chockey, and says "deaf?"

And Chockey, divided between terror and mirth, nods back again.

Without other incident, the journey up to the great city is accomplished, and, by three in the afternoon, up pull the four horses before the door of the King's Arms in the Strand, and Lady Peggy, and her woman, and her box, are set down in the yard, amid the din and bustle incident always to the arrival of travelers.

Not much attention is bestowed on them. A couple of unpretending appearing women, evident-



And Lady Peggy and her woman found themselves on the road to town.

Themselves on the road

ly not persons of quality, as the meek little calf-skin box is their sole belonging; coming up to London too without even one man-servant,—bespeak but little consideration in the throng of ladies of fashion, gallants over their coffee, courtiers popping in for the news, sparks intent on ogling a pretty face or noting a trim ankle, that much o'er crowded the yard, ordinary and parlor of the King's Arms.

Just here once, for an instant, Lady Peggy's brave heart failed her; most, when she espied at the door, just getting into her silken-curtained chair, a lady, so young and beautiful, so richly girt, so spick and span, with such wonderful patches and such snowy powdered locks, such sparkling eyes, such begemmed fingers glistening through her mitts,—and knew at once that Lady Diana Weston was indeed "in town"!

She faltered a bit, indeed sank down on the box which Chockey had set in a corner of the yard, and, for a brief moment, both mistress and maid bedewed their masking falls with a few splashing tears.

Then spoke Lady Peggy, rising and plucking

up her spirits,—"Chock," said she, "beckon me a boy from yonder group; inquire the path to the corner of Holywell Road and Lark Lane; order him shoulder the box and lead the way. Speak with a swagger, Chock; knock the drops out of your lashes with a laugh, girl! Let 'em think we're old hands at the town and used to bein' waited upon!" Lady Peggy straightened herself in her grimy shoes, and gave the Levantine a twitch which she hoped was quite the mode.

Meantime Chockey did her mistress's bidding, and in less time than it takes to set it down, the two were following the lad, in and out of such a net and mazework of streets and lanes as set their heads a-whirling; now they wheeled around this bend, now across that alley,—foul-smelling as a ditch or a dirty dog; anon up a broader way where knockers shone and chairs waited at the curb; then a cut down here, and at last this was Holywell Road and yonder the opening of Lark Lane.

Well, to be sure, 'twas a sorry spot. As Lady Peggy paid the boy and stood on the step, she ruefully surveyed the environment; the wig-maker's opposite, with a wig in the window, she half-

laughingly noted, the very yellow counterpart of Sir Robin McTart's round pate; a dingy chocolate-house at t'other end of the row of dark, timbered, nodding houses; and this one of the stretch, taller, grimier even than it's forlorn neighbors, was where poor scribbling Kennaston hunted that jade called Fame!

At double-knock, came hobbling the charwoman, loath to be disturbed at her twilight pipe, but brisking at sight of Lady Peggy's now uncovered face and shilling between fingers.

"Yes, indeed, here His Lordship lodged and ate; was His Lordship at 'ome? Nay, that was he not! but surely might be before cock-crow to-morrow! His Lordship's sister! Lawk! Would Her Ladyship and Her Ladyship's woman condescend to come in and mount? What a beautiful surprise for 'is young Lordship when he did get 'ome to be sure! No, he 'adn't gone out alone, a gay spark, a gentleman of the first quality 'ad come, as often 'e did, and fetched h'off His Lordship with 'im, last night; 'is name? Was it Sir Robin McTart peradventure? No, no, that was a name she 'ad never

'eard! 'Twas no Duke nor Earl neither, but a—Sir, Sir—?"

And as the old woman and Chockey, carrying the calf-skin box between them, reached the last landing and set their burden down in thankfulness, Lady Peggy, feeling the way, said:

"Sir Percy de Bohun, perchance? Methinks my brother has a companion by some such title!"

"Aye, that's 'im! Ah, My Lady, as splendid a gentleman as ever sang 'God save the King!' free with 'is sovereigns, My Lady, as trees is with their nuts; and, to match 'im for oaths! there's not that Prince o' the blood as can swear so beautiful when 'e's dead drunk. These is 'is Lordship's your brother's chambers, My Lady!" throwing open the door and ushering Peggy and her servitor into as dingy, dirty, empty, sad, bare, and unkempt an appearing place as ever mortal and intrepid lady set two tired feet within.

But Lady Peggy, for the nonce, was only eager on one point.

"Drunk, say you, dame? and wherefore should so generous a young gentleman be a-gallopin' that silly road, eh?"

"Lawk! Your Ladyship! 'ow should I know? but His Lordship's own gentleman, My Lady, what 'olds 'im up and steadies His Lordship in 'is cups, do say"—the old charwoman, whisking the dust of ages from a wooden chair, sets it for Lady Peggy and bends to tidy the hearth and gather together the few shingles and faggots strewn about.

"'Say' what?" urges Peggy, with eager eyes and a sixpence shining in her hand (another shilling's more than she dare hazard of her slender store)

"Do say, My Lady,—God bless Your Ladyship's sweet face! as it's h'all on account of a young lady!"

Lady Peggy's eyes sparkle and all at once the smoky room seems cheerful, and the tardy blaze in the fire-place glows and thaws her chilled bones and blood.

"Ah?" she says, smiling.

"Yes, My Lady, a splendid young lady of fashion, an heiress, a beauty, with half London a-danglin' after 'er; and 'er that 'aughty, as if she was of the royal family, and 'im a-killin' 'imself for 'er sake!"

And back again slide Kennaston's chambers into their original depravity of dirt and dreariness; and down goes the charwoman to her pipe; and Lady Peggy on the wooden chair, Chockey on the box, spread their fingers to the reluctant warmth and are silent; while the clock ticks on the mantelshelf; while the slit of blue that peers in at the window, grays; while the noises that are all new to these two, come rasping, roaring, shouting up to them through the broken pane—the dizzying, multitudinous, incoherent surge of London town, as it first smites ears not yet wonted to its fascination or its meaning—merely lonely, forlorn, dispirited new-comers who have not yet learned the passion and the melody that lie hidden in its Babel.

The waiting-woman is the first to move; with the homely excellent instincts of her class, she rises, and, after a slow glance around the place, falls "a-reddin' of it up" as she mentally designated her attempt. She seized the stumpy broom from its corner and swept the floor, brushed the maze of cobwebs from ceiling and walls; beat the mats; wiped the stools and table, the broad win-

dow-sills and the shelves; shook out the dingy, ink-stained cloth; straightened the litter of books and papers, quills and horns; and finally went a-peering into the cupboards. A grimy coffee-pot and a well-matching kettle were fished out and rubbed; the kettle filled with water from the tub-full on the landing and straightway hung upon the crane; plates and cups and saucers and spoons brought forth; a paper of coffee, a jug of milk and a bottle of sugar discovered, and presently Chockey handed her mistress a cup of steaming mocha and modestly poured one for herself.

"Oh, Chock!" cries Lady Peggy, setting down the empty cup. "What a fool was I to come! What am I, forsooth, in all this great desert but a grain of sand! And Percy, not," Lady Peggy stamps her muddy red-heeled shoe fiercely, "a-dyin' for me in the least! and my twin a-livin' in such a hole! wherever does he sleep, Chock?" Surveying the barn-like apartment in disgust and dismay, her gaze finally arrested by a ladder slanting in the darkest corner and reaching up to an opening in the ceiling.

"Up there, I dare be sworn! Lud! If this 'tis

to be an author," flouts Peggy, "God ha' mercy on 'em! I tell you what, Chock. I'll tarry a little, have a word with Kennaston; then we'll back, girl, whence we came, quick; I'll send word to Sir Robin McTart, and then let weddin'-bells ring as soon as ever he sees fit. No more o' love for me, Chock. I'm done with it forever in this world; I'll take marriage instead!"

Chockey shakes her head ruefully as her mistress, more to emphasize her latest resolve than from any other motive, flings wide open the cracked doors of the clothes-press next the chimney-piece and gives a tempestuous shake-out to the garments a-hanging on the pegs.

"Lud! look! Kennaston's suit of gray velvets, not much the worse for wear! Small need has the poor lad for fine clothes, I warrant ye; most like a-keepin' of 'em for pawn-shop use and bread and butter! Chock, unlock the box, and get out the waistcoat I broidered for my twin, at much expense of temper, against his birthday. So! Smooth it out! it's brave, eh, Chock? Fit for Court, I should fancy, and, that's right, the laced cravat!

poor duck, I do misdoubt me, if he's seen a frill on his wrist since quittin' home! There!"

Lady Peggy surveys the gifts she's brought, as Chockey takes them out.

"Lawk, Madam, 'twere better, were't not, I bundle all Your Ladyship's duds and mine up yonder against His Lordship's comin'?"

"Right, Chock! up with 'em, and I'll steady the road while you climb!" Suiting action to word, as Chockey, bearing the calf-skin box, cautiously mounts the rickety ladder.

"What's it like, Chock?"

"Nothin' I ever seed afore, My Lady; dark, stuffy; a mattress a-sprawlin' on the bare boards, and a pair of torn quilts, and a piller no bigger'n my fist, that's all!"

"Enough, Chock; you and I can sleep our one night in London there as soundly," Lady Peggy's proud lip quivers, "as I could on down or 'twixt my mother's best lamb's wool! Come down, Chock, by the fire; and list, to-morrow, at first crow, we'll back to Kennaston. We'll 'a' been up to town, Chock! and, savin' my twin, never will Lady Peg-

gy look again on face of any man who now treads London street. I swear!"

"Hark, Madam!"

Chockey jumps from the ladder, eyes a-popping, while the hubbub in the street below cuts short her mistress's valiant speech. Such a hullaballoo; such a shouting, echoing from one end of the precinct to t'other, as speeds mistress and maid both to the window, a-craning their necks far out; as sends the charwoman from her ingle-nook under ground, a-hobbling up the steep four flights.

IV

In the which is rehearsed how Her Ladyship did nimbly slip into man's attire and estate.

Through the fast gathering mist, through the smoke that's London's own, the two women leaning behold a gay company of gallants rounding the far corner, two hundred feet away; linked arms, swords a-touching, heels a-clattering; one voice high and young, uplifted in a lilt like this: Lady Peggy had heard that voice before.

In years to come when gallants sing,
In praise of ladies fair,
All will allow, I pledge you square,
That brighter eyes n'er banished care,
Than those that bade us do and dare,

When George the Third was King!
Let roof and rafter chime and ring,
Let echo shout it back: we sing
The merry days, My Lords and Sirs!
When George the Third is King!

And at the chorus, a brave dozen more of pairs of lusty lungs to take it up and urge it on with flashing rapiers, knocking points, in the flare of the lights from the coffee-house at hand; and good twelve of plumed hats a-tossing in the air, and catch-again; and laughter loud and long, then dying down as that fresh sweet voice begins its second verse, and just so the old charwoman knocks hastily at the door, calling in Lady Peggy's head and Chockey's from the open.

"'H'askin' Your Ladyship's parding," says she, "but I thought it no more'n my duty to acquaint Your Ladyship, as can't see from this 'eight, that Your Ladyship's brother, Lord Kennaston's a-comin' 'ome, and a-bringin' with 'im 'is comrades, among 'em, Sir Percy de Bohun, and mayhap 'er Ladyship'd like best,"—now addressing Chockey, as Lady Peggy paced the floor in a too-evident agita-

tion—"like best," continued the dame, "to 'ide 'erself, and h'if so, the noble gentlemen h'all of 'em, I'm thinkin', bein' summat raised with wine, my 'umble bit of a place h'is h'at Her Ladyship's service for the night or as long as Her Ladyship sees fit, for I am this minute sent for to go down into the country immediate, where, God help us all! my tenth daughter what's married to her second husband lies at death's door!"

And all the while the old charwoman is speaking between her bits of broken teeth, Peggy hears that other voice uplifted, ringing, gay, glad, care-free, as it seems to her strained ears, up and down the darkening little street, tapping at the window-panes, tapping at her heart-strings and stretching them to such a tension of anger, outraged pride, and wounded affection as never Lady suffered before.

She thanks the old woman and hastily dismisses her; then, facing about from the window whence she has been able to descry the merry group making a rush into the coffee-house, Her Ladyship, seized by a sudden mad impulse, says to her woman:

"Chock, take my purse, tumble as fast as your two legs can carry you down, out, across to the wigmaker's we laughed at when we came in, buy me the yellow wig, Chock, that adorns the front, an' come not back without it, an you love me, Chock; wheedle, coax, promise more'n there is here," sticking the purse in the astounded woman's hand, "but get me the wig that is the very double of dear Sir Robin's own sweet pate!" She pushes Chockey out on the landing with an impetus that sends her well on her errand, and then, shutting and buttoning the door, Lady Peggy gets herself out of her furbelows and petticoats, her stays, her bodice, her collar, brooch, kerchief, pocket, hoop and hair pins, and into her brother's suit of grays, the new waistcoat and cravat she's brought him for a gift; she tips the coffee-pot and washes her face and pretty throat and hands in the brown liquid; she plaits her long hair and winds it close and tight about her head; she buckles on Kennaston's Court-rapier, she fetches his gray plumed hat with its paste buckle from the press; she ogles herself in the six-inch mirror; she swaggers, swings, struts; and, says she, dipping her finger in the

soot of the old chimney and marking out two black beetling brows over her own slender ones,—

"An I know not how to play at being Sir Robin, Lady Peggy's chosen sweetheart, boldly and with a loud voice; know not how to swear and prance and pick a pretty quarrel, crying 'Match me your Lady Diana with my Lady Peggy!' then never did I dozen times for sport don my twin's breeches and coat and masquerade at being that sweet creature,—a man! Ha! I have it all at fingers' ends!" cries Peggy, fumbling in her discarded pocket. "Here's the very letter I writ for Sir Robin to take and present to my brother. 'Twill stand me in good stead to-night that I forgot to give it to him. If Chockey but succeed in cajoling the man out of his wig, an' if the gallants come not ere I can fit it to my head!"—opening the door impetuously almost to bump against the returning Chockey's nose.

"Thou hast it! Oh Chock! 'Tis I! be not afraid. Come in; adjust it to my poll,—so! Lose not a moment; pick up my petticoats, leave not a scrap that bespeaks a woman; there! You're dropping a hair-pin; now, up with ye to the loft! an' no

matter if rats nibble your toes, Chock, or mice come play bo-peep with your eye-winkers, or spiders weave across your mouth, an you stir, cry out, move an inch to the creaking of a board, I'll leave you here your lone self to shift as best you may! Up girl!" touching the speechless Chockey with the rapier-tip urgingly, "and 'tis Sir Robin McTart that bids you!"

The obedient and trembling waiting-woman was not much sooner out of sight in the loft, than again the voice echoed up to where Lady Peggy stood in the gruesome ambush of the landing, well back in the darkest corner behind a pile of boards and débris, bricks and dust, and what-not-else tumbled there from the chimney during the last and many previous storms.

Nearer came the song, then the chorus, broken now with more of chat and laughter; the footsteps sound upon the street, the house-door opens, slams, and up they troop, stumbling in the blackness but knowing well the way, it seems; merry, jocund, up, up, with the refrain of the song still lingering amid their talk in snatches, until they gain the top.

"Are we then indeed at your door, Kennaston?" cries the first to reach, as he feels at the latch.

"Split me, Escombe, you're there if you can go no farther. Egad! Sirs," cries the young host, "an I never reach to pinnacle of Fame's ladder, at the least do I lodge as high as I could get:— a roof that suits my empty purse!"

"Nay, Kennaston." Peggy, in her man's gear, trembles at sound of that tone, for 'tis Percy who speaks now, whiles they all push pell-mell into her twin's chambers, strike lights, pull out candles from cupboard, stir the fire.

"Nay, Kennaston," says this one, "while De Bohun lives there's ever a full purse lad, t' exchange for thy empty one,— and well thou know'st it."

"Tut, tut!" answers the young man of letters, adding as he glances about, "'pon my soul, gentlemen, my Hebe has been outdoing herself. Saw we ever before in this room, stools lacking dust? floor, riff-raff? walls their festoons? hearth its ashes? coffee-pot its rust? and. by my life, the kettle filled and steaming!"

A peal of mirth greets this nimble sally, as the

host pulls from the table drawer a pack of cards and his guests from their pockets a dozen bottles of Falernian.

"Dead broke, am I, My Lords and Gentlemen," says he, "but here's the whole Court and the deuce," flinging the pack in the midst of his guests, "play away an ye've a shilling left amongst ye. Let it be Commerce or Hazard; I'll hold the counters; fill the glasses, as long as there's a drop to pour; keep a lookout for sharpers," laughing, "and thank God I've even a garret wherein to welcome men of vogue like yourselves!"

A burst of applause follows this; plumed hats are tossed aside, wrist-frills upturned; His Grace of Escombe is shuffling the pack; Sir Percy stands with his back to the fire, coat-skirts held from the cheerful blaze he's made; stools are drawn up; the host takes his silk kerchief from his throat and polishes the mugs. Chockey has her eye glued to a chink in the cover that divides her loft from the scene of revelry below;—when, a bold knock sounds at the door, and the master with a cheery:

"Come along!" throws wide the portal.

The fine gentleman who stands before him makes a profound bow, to which he responds with one not less magnificent.

"Allow me, Lord Kennaston of Kennaston, since it is, I am persuaded, the brother of Lady Peggy Burgoyne whom I have the pleasure of addressing—?" and at her name, Sir Percy lets his brocaded skirts flop and starts forward eagerly—"of addressing, to present to you this note in the hand-writing of Your Lordship's adorable sister, the which she gave me, wherewith to present and commend me to Your Lordship's good offices while I am up in town!"

Another salaam given and returned, while Kennaston, with grace, ushers his new acquaintance in, sets him a stool, all the while eye quick-perusing Lady Peggy's scrawl.

"Gentlemen!" says their host, "allow me to introduce to you, and, Sir, these gentlemen to you, Sir Robin McTart of Robinswold, Kent, His Grace of Escombe, Sir Percy de Bohun, the Honorable Jack Chalmers, Sir Wyatt Lovell," etc., etc., etc. The which ceremony being concluded amid many bows and all due forms of mutual delight, the

new-comer was cordially invited to take a hand in the game.

Now, as true 'twas that Lady Peggy had never been in a coach until the morning to which this was evening, so true was it that Her Ladyship had not a farthing to her pocket left, and although a good gamester's daughter, she hesitated, making pretense of hanging her hat and of settling to its proper place her rapier, and pinching her ruffles. While she did so, the rest chatting, Sir Percy crossed the room, and, in a tone that was not heard save by the one he addressed, said to Kennaston:

"As I live, Sir, now's my chance; I'll pick a quarrel with this jackanapes that's dared to oust me from Peggy's heart. Aye, will I! the sooner the better; blood'll spill, Kennaston, or ever that puppet and I are thirty minutes older! Mark me! Your sister shall know and hear I'm willing to die for her sake, or—to kill!"

Peggy, meantime, in this second, got her courage well screwed up, and, with a laugh, fitly disguising her voice, said she, seating herself with her legs well under the table—for, at this particu-

lar juncture, Her Ladyship, looking down, had beheld with dismay the womanish and forgotten fashion of her shoes.

"Rot me! Gentlemen, your humble servant's fresh from Will's, where, 'pon my life! such an apt company of wits and beaux encountered I, as swept my pockets clean and left me not the jingle of a shilling wherewith to bless myself. Your Grace, My Lords, Sirs, and Gentlemen," quoth Peggy with a fine inclusive wave of her hand, "will, I'm sure, thus excuse me from the game to-night."

But she had counted without either host or guests, for all of these save Sir Percy de Bohun on the instant pulled purses out and tendered them, crying, as with a single voice,—

"Fie! Fie! Sir Robin! Are we highwaymen? tricksters? Honor us by using our sovereigns as they were your own, eh, Sir Percy, have we not the right of the matter?" asked Jack Chalmers, turning to the tall young man, who, having crossed the room again, now stood leaning moodily against the chimney-piece, frowning, tapping hearth with heel in too evident impatience of the subject of discussion.

"I humbly ask your pardon, Mr. Chalmers," he replies, "both for differing with you all, and for expressing the same. To my way of thinking"—adds Sir Percy, with deliberation, ill-matched by the flash of his eyes as they take a scornful measure of the supposed Sir Robin—"to my way of thinking, any gentleman who carries his company into any other gentleman's chambers without the means of a paltry game of loo or écarté in 's pocket 's not quite such a proper young man 's he might be!" And with this, Sir Percy laid his hand upon his sword hilt, and Kennaston laid his upon that, attempting to stay the torrent.

"Tut! tut!" cried this one and that.

"His Lordship's dead drunk with Cupid, Sir Robin, mind him not," whispers another.

"De Bohun breaks a joke," exclaims a third, all at once.

And in the same moment, also, upsprings my Lady Peggy, hand on hilt too, and says she loudly, same time as the rest:

"A pox on ye for a libeler! Sir Percy de Bohun, mayhap it's the errand Your Lordship's up in town

a-pursuing hath turned Your Lordship's brain?" Here Lady Peggy laughs in derision and stands full height updrawn upon her girl's red heels.

"Curse me! but you are impertinent, Sir," responds Percy, taking a step forward, his anger rising as he beholds his purpose galloping to the goal of its quick fulfilment. "What then, an it please you, is my 'errand up in town?' since you are thus familiar with my gaits; tell 'em off, Sir Robin McTart, I give ye leave!"

"With your leave, or without it," cries Peggy in a voice that causes Chockey to lift the loft-cover an inch higher, and so, kneeling with nose flattened against floor, to behold her mistress's fine and splendid show of valor. "I'd have you hear, Sir, that to persons of fashion the matter of your suit near Lady Diana Weston's a jeer and jest of the first flavor,—for 'twere easy seen a lady of her quality, Sir, 'd not be a-wasting her time on you."

"Damme! Sir!" cries Sir Percy, now thoroughly aroused and far more in earnest than ever he was at the beginning. "You lie! Aye, My Lords, Sirs, and Gentlemen! Nay, ye can not stop my mouth,"

unsheathing his rapier; Peggy does likewise, each pushing and warding from them the restraining hands and words of their associates.

"A foul lie! My errand up in town, Sir Robin McTart, is to try to drown my sorrows as I may, because the only lady that ever I loved set me the pace to the devil by a-refusing of my suit come Easter-day, three months to an hour ago."

Lady Peggy flushes under the coffee stains; her arm trembles; but she is valiantly happy and confident, and her heart goes beating the joyfullest sort of a tune beneath the 'broidered waistcoat she'd made for her twin.

"And her name," cries Sir Percy with a glance of imperious, aggressive temper shot right into Peggy's very face,—"her name's not Lady Diana Weston, but 'tis Lady Peggy Burgoyne!—"

Now Chock's whole head slips leash, and she bends with bated breath and heaving breast to listen closer.

Lady Peggy starts, but waving her rapier over her head, laughs loud, long and derisively.

"Lady Peggy Burgoyne, Sir," shaking the hilt of his weapon under Peg's nose, repeats Sir Percy.

"And until you, Sir, with your damnable arts and silly bumpkin ways, when she encountered you in Kent, had turned her from me, she was to me kindest of ladies and of loves. Your servant, Sir Robin McTart," concludes Percy with a low bow, sticking the floor with his rapier-point, "when and where you please!"

"Here and now!" cries Peg, her heart a-thumping for joy, but so pleasured and alas! so puzzled with the getting out of a scrape, which she has found so little difficulty in getting into, that she is feign on, and make the best cut she can with her cloth.

"Here and now!" repeats Her Ladyship, "for I do throw back into Your Lordship's teeth the lie" —Peg bows low to her opponent—"you gave me whiles, and affirm that for these many years, or ever you, Sir, set eyes upon her, Lady Peggy Burgoyne's been mine, heart and soul, Sir!"

"Damn you, Sir!" interrupts Percy hotly, unable to contain his choler,—"to so defame the noblest lady that ever was born!"

"I repeat," cries Peggy, glowing with suppressed delight at her lover's fidelity, and eager for as

much more as he may have to vent. "Lady Peggy's eyes are glued fast of this face of mine! Peggy's hands are my hands! Peggy's lips are my lips! Peggy's kisses have ever been my kisses!"

At this, Sir Percy tears off his coat, waistcoat, cravat; flings them into the corner; rolls up his sleeves, while a confused murmur circulates amid the gallants over their cards and Falernian wine.

"Peggy's heart beats in my breast!" continues Her Ladyship, ranting and swashing up and down the room; upsetting a couple of candles in her path, and now all unrecking of her womanish shoes. "Gentlemen," panting, smiling, triumphant, saluting her companions with her weapon, "Lady Peggy and I do so adore, love and worship one another that we are not two but one!"

"Here and now!" shouts Sir Percy. "Off with your coat and ruffles, Sir, and choose any two of these gentlemen to your seconds, Sir; I'll take who's left!"

Chalmers and Kennaston press forward to Lady Peggy, while His Grace of Escombe and Mr. Wyatt cross to Sir Percy.

"Lord Kennaston, I pray you pace off the dis-

tance," says Lady Peggy, now at the top of her bent and delirious with joy over Percy's love of her, with no least intention of touching him, good fencer though she be, and willing enough—such a woman is she—to risk a prick at his hands for sake of the after-salve of the mighty gratitude and passion the minx is now sure of.

"Off with your trappings, Sir," cries Percy.

"That will I not!" cries Peggy, taking the first position on the field of honor in all the bravery of her twin's suit of gray velvets. "You'll kill me, an you do't at all, with my clothes on ready to my burial, and I swear ye all, with my latest breath, Lady Peggy and I'll lie in the same coffin when it comes to that ceremony."

Then in the smoky flare from the dying fire and the slovening candles stuck in their bottles; 'mid the murmur and succeeding hush of the gallants, some with cups, some with cards in their hands, Peggy and her lover salute and take their stands.

Says she: "What's the word, My Lord?"

Says he: "If you like, let Lord Kennaston shake the dice-box; at the third throw, Sir, I'm here, ready food for your steel to flesh in!"

"It suits me well," answers Peg, as her twin rattles the ivories. "Here's for Lady Peggy!" cries she.

"Here's for Lady Peggy Burgoyne!" shouts he, as Kennaston makes the third throw, and Chockey, like to swoon and she a stout heart, never-ail or afeard of even a churchyard on the darkest night, shaking like an aspen-leaf, puts foot on the top rung of the ladder; and Peg and Percy thrust, lunge, withdraw, riposte, hither, yon, keen-eyed, pitched to highest note, nerves strung to cracking—just for a few seconds, shorter time'n it takes to set it down, far.

"A touch, a hit!" cry all at once as a spurt of blood darts up the supposed Sir Robin's blade, and Percy bows, declaring himself quite satisfied, as he must, though 'tis a state of mind he's very remote from enjoying.

My Lady Peggy winces under her wound, but she has not been Kennaston's playfellow for naught, and as ugly pricks as this one have been her portion in the past; Chockey, nevertheless, from her nest, pales and utters a smothered shriek which is quite lost in the loud talking that follows,

while Chalmers winds the kerchief Sir Percy tenders about the wrist of the wounded.

"Now to the cards, gentlemen," cries His Grace of Escombe, pulling out his purse. "To such a gallant as our friend Sir Robin here, my fingers itch to lose ten, twenty, nay as many pounds as his skill can rid me of; for such a pretty play of the steel as his must argue a lucky throw of the dice."

"Hear! hear! hear!" shout they all, drinking brimming mugs to the two who have lately fought, and settling themselves at the tables with a rattle and a rush of laughter and merry humor.

Lady Peggy sits, gritting her teeth at the slit in her white flesh, with her back to the door and, betwixt the uproar and clinking and shuffling, she hears footsteps coming up the stairs. Some intuition bids her be the one to respond to the rapping that presently sounds out.

"Asking your pardon," murmurs Her Ladyship to her companions as she quits the table. When, as she opens, a new-caught street urchin speaks sharp, with saucer eyes in-peering at the quality.

"An it please yer Lordships, there's a fine gentlemen below as his name is Sir Robin McTart."

Peggy draws in, bangs the door in the boy's face, squares about, and says:

"By your leave, gentlemen, a most particular messenger awaits me below; for a few moments only, I crave your indulgence for my absence. I'll be with you in ten minutes."

"No! no! no!" cry they all, save De Bohun, who is counting his cards, and Sir Wyatt who exclaims:

"Yes, an it be a messenger on business for a fair lady; no, an it be otherwise. Gadzooks! Sir Robin, make a half-clean breast of it. Comes Mercury from Phyllis or from a mere man?"

Peg answers: "I swear to you, Sirs, I go down on business of the gravest import to a lady," and makes for the door.

"Pledge her! Pledge her! a bumper! a bumper!" cry they all in one voice with much pleasant laughter.

"Here's to Sir Robin's nameless fair! Zounds! but for so little yeared a personage to have two strings to his bow!"

V

Wherein Lady Peggy doth encounter her flouted lover, receiveth a rapier-prick: makes acquaintance of her hated rival and of Mr. Brummell.

And much more of a like nature reaches Lady Peggy as she plunges down the stairs and presently finds herself, by the light of the lamp of his chair, a-confronting Sir Robin McTart himself!

"Nay, nay, Sir! I am not Kennaston of Kennaston," responds Peg, looking grave, and making excellent show of her blood-stained, linen-bound wrist.

"'Tis here he dwells, and, as I know well by reputation, you are a peaceful, law-abiding man, I'd counsel you not to mount. Such a company

of cut-throat, cut-purse brawlers, Sir, as would not leave a farthing in your pocket or lace upon your shirt."

Sir Robin, as Her Ladyship had shrewdly guessed, drew back and shivered at this lively description.

"Trust me, Sir Robin: hist!" Peg's voice sinks to a mere whisper. "I am Lady Peggy's best friend and neighbor at home; 'twould be her will, an she stood here, that you should not adventure your precious life in the unseemly crowd with which her brother hath seen fit to surround himself."

"Lud, Sir! Who are you," chatters Sir Robin trembling betwixt delight and terror, "that knows so well the temper of Lady Peggy Burgoyne's disposition? What's your name, Sir?"

"No matter for my name, Sir, I have Lady Peggy's best interests at heart, and yours. She bade me, did ever I encounter you in evil neighborhood, tell you, for her sake, eschew it. Hark ye! Sir Robin, out of this hole as fast as your men's legs can carry you. Above yonder, 's one who's sworn to kill you!"

"Who's he?" demands Sir Robin, one foot now in his sedan, his little eyes twinkling both ways with fright.

"Sir Percy de Bohun," replies Peg in a hollow whisper. "Look you, Sir," showing her bloody wrist, "there's a taste of his quality. I warn you—'tis from Peggy's own self—get back to Kent, whence you came, and tarry not, for your life's at yonder desperado's mercy while you linger up in town."

"Is My Lady Peggy returned to Kent to her godmother?" quavers Sir Robin, now well inside his chair.

"Nay, Sir; as her brother supposes, she's at home at Kennaston."

"I'll seek her there!" cries Sir Robin, tendering his hand. "And, Sir, my humble duty and gratitude to you for your admirable condescension. I would I knew your name and station."

"I'm up in town incognito, Sir, for a lady's sake," smiles the minx.

"When I return, Sir, I'll seek you out at White's or Will's. I dare be sworn so fine a gentleman must needs be a buck of the first order."

"Seek me, Sir, and Godspeed you down to Kennaston or Kent!"

At the word, Sir Robin in his chair sets forth a-swinging round the corner, light of heart and bright of hope, while the subject and object of his thoughts and passion stands for a moment leaning, sighing, betwixt laughter and tears, against the door-frame.

My Lady Peggy's first impulse is to cut and run; indeed her slim legs are so stretched to begin, when the remembrance of poor Chock in her garret cage comes to her mind, and, with a grimace, she turns in, jumps up the stairs, and is in the midst of the group, now well on in their cups and more hilarious than orderly in their conversation.

Peg was not her father's girl for naught that night. To the tune of three hundred pounds, fourteen and six, was she the richer, and rewarded for the many dreary evenings she had spent at Kennaston, a-watching her father win and lose with the Vicar and the Bishop, whenever the latter came on his visits.

By dint of spilling her wine deftly under the table, she had emptied as many mugs as the best

bibber among 'em, and at four in the morning found herself the only one who was sober, or even awake.

'Twas not a beautiful sight thus to behold, in the pale pink of the dawn, a dozen or so of merry gentlemen a-sprawling about on floor, tables, chairs,—a-snoring and a-tossing in their sleep; but 'twas of the fashion of the times when, to be a fine gentleman, one must be drunk, at the least, once in the twenty-four hours.

All save Sir Percy; almost at swords' points he had quitted the company hours before, a little in his cups, but steady withal, murmuring to himself as he fumbled on the rickety stairs—Peg, leaning over the rail, unseen in the darkness, womanlike to watch lest he trip and fall, heard him:

"'Sdeath! an what that popinjay say be true, I'll marry Lady Diana out of hand, and show the minx I'm not to be cut out of a wife by such a flea-bitten rotten-rod as Sir Robin McTart!"

"So easy taken then is my loss!" says Peggy, with a renewed fire of jealousy burning at her heart, as she returns to the scene of her winnings.

Sick at heart, for a single instant she surveys

the room, and then, finger on lip, it does not take her long to signal up to Chockey, motion her down with the calf-skin box, and to begin, with shamed face, in the darkest corner, to strip off her man's attire.

Lady Peggy has laid aside the yellow wig; Chockey weeping, praying that they may get away in safety, is spreading out the Levantine fit for her mistress to jump into it, when, for the second time within the twelve hours, Her Ladyship's heart stands still to the patter and thump of footsteps climbing the last flight.

"Hold, Chock!" cries she, clapping on the wig. "Bundle up my duds, tie 'em tight; so! give me it; pick up the box, put on your cloak and bonnet and a bold face; follow and ape me. An you love me, Chock, an' I thrust, thrust too! an' I knock 'em down, follow suit! I'd sooner die, Chock, than be caught now!"

With which, My Lady Peggy flung wide the door, pushed out the Abigail, drew her weapon, and, with a rush, the two of them tumbled down the stairs, taking on their way a giant of a man who struggled and struck out, and dropped fruits

and flowers and curses, and yet gave in to the splendid tweeks and pinches which the lusty Chockey dealt him on his arms and legs, and, falling headlong, on the lower stairs, darted up the street crying:

"Watch!" at the top of his lungs, nor getting any answer, for Watch was snoring in the tavern and the sun now shining broad.

"Chock," said her mistress, "go you on before me to the King's Arms, where we alighted, engage the seats in the coach, and hark ye, child, an aught betide I come not, get you home without me and tell His Lordship I'm gone to Kent on a sick-call from my godmother. Lud! it's lies all the way to being a man! I'll not walk with you, lass; 'tis not seemly, and when I reach the inn I'll pretend I know you not, hire a room, change my clothes and slip down to you, unseen if I can. Now, off with you, quickly, for I ache to follow. Would to God I could doff these garments and into my petticoats again!" added Lady Peggy ruefully, glancing at her hastily tied up bundle and, at the same moment, with the broad of her sword,

pushing Chock into the street with a will that sent her a-spinning on her way.

Indifferent then, as though the outgoing damsel were no concern of hers, presently, with a swagger, yet ill-concealing the anxiety she felt afresh as now sobs and female voices assailed her ears, the mock Sir Robin McTart emerged upon the street.

There halted a chair between the posts. In the chair sat Lady Diana Weston accompanied by her woman. Both wept and trembled, while still afar the stout lungs of the terrified giant shouted:

"Watch!"

Peg stood still and stared; all the jealous blood in her burned in her cheeks. Lady Diana here! and wherefore? and at such an untoward hour; veil displaced, eyes red, but still most undeniably handsome, nay beautiful.

"Oh Sir!" cried Lady Diana beseechingly, raising two imploring hands outside the chair door toward Lady Peggy.

"I pray of your honor!" whimpered the Abigail in concert.

"I implore your protection, Sir, as you are a gentleman and man of honor, as your mien dis-

poses me. I came here but now and sent my footman up to the rooms of a—a friend, who is ill, Sir,—with a token of regard in the shape of fruit and flowers, when the man must have been set upon by thieves and beaten, for he—"

"I heard him," finishes Peg, stepping nearer to the chair. "And I assure you, Madam, I put the varlet who attacked him to his pace with a prick. If I can serve you further, command me."

As My Lady bows low, she is conscious that it now behooves her to state concisely her name and station; and, loathing and hating the deception more than she could express, she still adds (her motive not unmixed with the natural curiosity to discover who is the object of Lady Diana's morning call):

"Sir Robin McTart of Robinswold, Kent, at Your Ladyship's service.

Diana bows, blushes, almost ogles, minx that she is, noting well the fine eyes and beautiful mouth of the gallant at her side.

"Lady Diana Weston, Sir Robin, daughter to the Earl of Brookwood, at your service."

Peg bows, hat in hand, bundle under arm. Swift

as youth's impulse ever is, says she, taking lightning-like measure of her chance and determined to probe matters to their core:

"Your Ladyship's name was on the lips above," nodding up at Kennaston's windows. "I drank the toast with a will, I do assure you, and would double it now. Surely, if you'll allow me to say so, Sir Percy de Bohun's a gentleman of a rare good taste, likewise Lord Kennaston, Sir Wyatt Lovell, half-a-dozen more a-pledging Your Ladyship to the tune of *nonpareil* all night long."

"You flatter, Sir, I do protest!" cried the lady in the chair, blushing like the reddest rose that grows, but who might say for whose sake? since Peg had named so many.

"Oh, Sir," Lady Diana's voice now lowered. "Your countenance is one to inspire confidence. I pray you judge me not harshly if I venture to inquire, since you were of their company, how fares poor Sir Percy de Bohun? The fruits and flowers I fetched were for him, since I am informed he pines, eats nothing, droops, mopes, and no longer is to be enticed among the fair. Can you give me news of him?—or of—Lord Kennaston?" adds

Lady Diana wilily and with another magnificent accession of color. Thus did Slyboots pursue inquiry on that lame horse which is named Subterfuge.

"Aye, Madam, that can I. 'Tis as you say; but as you yourself, if report speak true, be the cause of his distemper, methinks you should know how to effect the cure. I see Your Ladyship's man returning; there is no more danger. I take my leave of you, Madam," hand to heart, bundle sticking out under other arm. "It is to me one of the most fortunate chances of life to have had this encounter," bending sweet eyes, which Diana returns with a will. "Fear nothing! the cut-throats have long since made off by a rear alley. The shouter is doubtless ere this at his cover. Did you need my further protection, 'twould be yours."

"From my heart, Sir, I thank you," cries Lady Diana very sweetly. "May we meet again, and soon!"

Peggy bowing, walks quickly off, her pretty teeth gritted together.

"May we meet again! Never! Fruits and flowers! forsooth! Pines and droops! forsooth!

'Slife! and how the minx reddened at his name. A-seekin' of him out like that at cock-crow too! Lud! an these be town fashions and morals I'll be glad to get home! No I won't! No I won't!" spake out Lady Peggy's heart fit to burst bonds. "Percy's here, and my soul's here, and 'tain't no use to talk about having a spirit, and a-stoppin' lovin' when you ain't loved! You can't do it!"

Peggy, recking not of her path, eyes glued to ground, paced on, having forgot the whole world else, in the misery of her discovery of Lady Diana's passion for Sir Percy.

There were few abroad at that early hour. Some market wagons leisuring to the city; an occasional chariot full of gallants getting home after the night's frolic; and just now, at the cross of two streets, a handsome coach thrown open-windowed, with a gentleman, the very pink and model of all elegance, lolling back amid the cushions.

By the lead of his eyes 'twas plainly to be seen he had not slept for forty-eight hours or so, but otherwise his aspect was as if newly out of a perfumed bandbox. Suddenly his gaze caught Peggy at the crossing, fixed itself upon the lace cravat

at her throat, and then, with a spring as alert as that of any monkey throwing himself out of tree by his tail, this mirror of fashion thrust his head out at window, jerked his coachman's arm, said in a voice not loud, but piercing:

"Worthing, run down the young gentleman at the crossing; don't hurt him, but run him down an' I'll give you twenty shillings!" He then sank back again amid the pillows.

No sooner said than done.

Just at the instant when Peggy recalled her position and was bewilderedly wondering where she had wandered to, clutching her bundle and all of a muddle, click! grazed coach-wheels against her shins, cock went her hat into the puddle, but, heaven be praised! her wig clung, and she clung to her bundle; out of coach the pink brocade gentleman, down from the rumble his footman, pick up Lady Peggy, hat and all, rubbing the mud out of her silk stockings, clapping her hands; yet relented she not from the bundle, and all a-breath the loller cries:

"Into my coach, Sir! I do humbly crave pardon, Sir, I do indeed. I'll not take no for an

answer, Sir, not by my oath! Such a damage from one gentleman to another, Sir, demands all the reparation possible, Sir," and forthwith Peggy is lifted into the splendid coach and the splendid gentleman springs in after her, and the footmen jump up and the whip cracks, and off they whirl before she can open her mouth.

"Mr. Brummell at your service, Sir," continues he, feeling of Peg's palm, noting the wound at her wrist, and the pallor of her face which shines even though the coffee stains. "We're en route to Peter's Court where my surgeon shall attend you. 'Slife! Sir, you're not hurt, I'm sure. I told Worthing not to endanger a hair of your head and it's impossible he should have disobeyed me!"

Peggy hears this singular string of speeches and, although stunned a bit and not a little alarmed in her mind, she has country breeding at her back and such a robust constitution as rallies on the spot.

"I'd be obliged, Mr. Brummell, if you'd set me down at once, Sir! I'm none the worse, and I've business of import calling me far hence, and with dispatch."

"Never, Sir, never!" returns Beau Brummell, with an impressive wave of his jeweled hand. "Zounds! Sir, I had you spilled to get me the pattern and fashion of tying your cravat from you! and split me! if I let you go until I've mastered that adorable knot! I've my reputation at stake, Sir, for the tying of 'em. You've outdone me at your throat, Sir, and 'tis Beau Brummell, the best dressed and worst imitated man in Europe, that has the honor of telling you so. Come, come, Sir," continues this nonesuch, famed alike at Court and brawl for his finery and drollery, "out with your name, Sir, I beg, and render me your eternally grateful."

Lady Peggy's gaze falls inadvertently on the bundle across her knees; it begins to bulge and burst the paper and string, indeed a tape of her petticoat is oozing out even now as she pokes it back, hiding it's tell-tale under the skirt of her coat.

" 'Slife!" says Peggy to herself in a terrible heat. "An I must stop a man, I must. God's will—or the Devil's, as dad says—be done!" and forthwith

she tucks up her knee, lays hand on sword-hilt, laughs quite merrily and answers:

"Sir Robin McTart of Robinswold, Kent, at your service, Mr. Brummell. I do protest, upon my oath! 'twas a marvelous device to spill me to borrow my tie. 'Tis yours, Sir, and the fashion of it, an you'll do me the honor to accept a lesson."

"Sir Robin McTart!" echoes the Beau delightedly, "my old friend Sir Hector's son and heir? I swear, boy, you favor not your sire. Peace to his soul, 'twas an ugly gentleman, while you, Sir,—Zounds! The ladies'll make hay for you, I promise you. Where do you stop? Are you up in town long? What letters do you bring?"

"The King's Arms, Sir, in the Strand," replies Peg glibly, while the Beau frowns. "I'm arrived but yesterday. I brought not a letter, Sir. There you have my history."

"No King's Arms for Sir Hector's son. You'll home with me, lad; and I'll show you what town life is. I'll put you up at the best clubs, introduce you to the Prince; present you at Court; dine, wine, mount you,—Gadzooks, Sir Robin, the man that invented that tie of the lace!" tipping his

finger at Lady Peggy's home-made cravat, "deserves all and more than Brummell can do for him!"

At which Peggy laughed the more heartily, as that she felt the paper beneath her coat skirts crack wider, and was spent wondering what she should do when they should reach Peter's Court, and when she might be able to get into her Levantine once again.

VI

In the which Sir Percy de Bohun's own man goes on his master's errand to Kennaston Castle, crossing Sir Robin McTart on the road.

Somewhat later in the day, as the sun peeped in at the narrow windows of Kennaston's garret in Lark Lane, it shone straight down upon the face of Peg's twin, and also upon that of Sir Percy de Bohun, just returned, after a tub and a grooming at the hands of his faithful man Grigson, who even now was performing like offices for the young host. The other gentlemen had long since been set upon their legs and fetched off to their homes by their men.

Percy held his chin between his palms, his el-

bows resting upon the table where cards and glasses still littered.

"'Sdeath, Kennaston," cries he, without moving. "I can live this fashion no longer! To be shot like a partridge would be better. Flouted by Peggy, derided by this upstart Sir Robin, who, by my life! is a pretty fellow all said and done, is past endurance! Give me a pistol, Grigson, and I'll put an end of myself now and here."

To this passionate declaration, Kennaston merely makes answer by lifting an arm above the tub, waving it in the air, and, as Grigson scrubs him down, wagging his wet head and remarking:

"Don't be damned ridiculous, Percy, and pray hold your peace, since I am at this moment composing an ode to my mistress's smile."

"Your mistress be hanged, Sir! What know you of love to sit in a tub and make verses to her?"

"I know enough of't," sighs the host, "to have been in like case with yourself any time this twelvemonth! and 'tis a monstrous thing for you to thus impeach me, when 'tis you whom My Lady Diana favors rather than myself."

"Lady Diana be damned!" cries Percy rising.

"She's a coquette, Sir, and at bottom adores you, as does the fish the bait the while she plays and sidles 'round it, being sure in th' end she'll swallow it, hook and all."

"Very fine, i' faith, yet while I sigh, you're the one she smiles upon. Oh, Percy! Had I but a fortune! Could I but make my name in letters! Then perchance I'd stand my chance; but as 'tis," —Peg's twin fetches a sigh that sends the water splashing about the wine-stained floor.

"As 'tis, Sir, counsel me, an you love me. Shall I hie me to Kennaston and wait upon your sister?"

"Write her a letter of fire and sword, and blood and famine; stuff it full of oaths, protests, suicides, murders, as is a Christmas pudding of plums! There's quill, ink and paper to your hand."

"I'll do it and send it by Grigson on my fastest horse this day. I should have the answer before Friday?"

"Aye, you should," allows the host with an evident reservation. "Now, for God's sake, Sir, stop cackling and let me finish my ode."

Which he did a-sitting in his bath, while Grigson dressed his wig.

The toilet, and the letter, and the poem, were all three finished at once, and, without more ado, Sir Percy dispatched his man with the missive to Lady Peggy.

"Come not back until you deliver it in person," quoth the lover; "an you show yourself minus an answer, I'll ship you to the Colonies by the next packet."

After seeing him off the two young men repaired to the coffee-house they frequented, and there the first news that greeted them was an account, exaggerated to the last degree, as was the fashion of those times as well as these, of "Lady D—— W——'s adventure with footpads in Lark Lane, where her chair crossed en route to her mantua-maker's; of how Sir R——n McT——t had rescued Her Ladyship and Her Ladyship's Abigail from the clutches of these villains at the hazard of his own life; had, single-handed, put the whole gang to flight; and this, although suffering from a severe wound in the right wrist, the which this gallant young scion of a noble name had received in

an affair of honor with Sir P——y de B——n only that very night previous." In point of fact gossip cried, and print set forth, that "the town was ringing with the valor of Sir R——n McT——t, whose fame as a buck and man of fashion was no less than his expertness at the saving of Beauty in distress. For be it known that no other personage than the renowned Beau B——l had set his seal upon Sir R——n's mould by begging from him the pattern of his cravat and the mode of his knot. That Sir R——n was now a guest at Mr. B——l's home, and, being up in town for the season, let ladies fair beware and set their most adorable caps, for 'twas well understood so fine a young gentleman was nowhere else to be met with, nor one of such courage and skill at cards, saddle, or the dance."

The which as he read it gave Sir Percy no great food for congratulation, but the rather caused him to sink into a kind of melancholy from which no effort of his companion could arouse him. Like a dullard he sat, staring at the print or the walls, the livelong day, and far into the night, waiting for Grigson's return, and beside himself with a

silent jealous fury as each new entrance to the coffee-room gave his own particular version of Sir Robin's vogue.

The real little Sir Robin, meanwhile, on his journey down to Kennaston in search of My Lady Peggy, had got some three hours' start of the faithful Grigson, and even now, he, for the first time in his life, stood in the long, bare drawing-room of Kennaston Castle, tip-toeing to the mirror, pulling his wig this way and that in instant expectation of beholding the object of his passion, and rewarding her for her devotion to him, so manifested in the person of the gentlemanly "Incognito" of his last night's experience.

Hark! Yes, her footstep on the stair, the swish of female garments, a halt at the door. Sir Robin minced the length of the room and, reaching the entrance, found himself face to face with Chockey!

"Your mistress, bud, your mistress! Here!" thriftily pressing a shilling into Chock's palm. "Go tell her I am consumed with impatience, and eaten up with desire for a glimpse of Her Ladyship's form, and figure, and face. Go! Go!"

But Chockey does not budge.

"What ails the wench? Deaf?" cries Sir Robin, pinching her arm, for which he gets back a smart slap on his cheek.

"Tut! tut! What manners is that, and you handsome enough to kiss," adds the little Baronet diplomatically. "Come now, off and implore Lady Peggy to hasten."

"Her Ladyship's from home," finally Chockey says.

"What! Not at Kennaston?" Sir Robin's sharp eye can not help peering regretfully at the shilling Chockey twirls in her fingers.

"In Kent, doubtless, a-visiting her godmother, and a-hoping to see me there! eh, in Kent?"

"I don't know, Sir," replies the girl with a hint of tears in her voice.

"Don't know! What do you mean?" exclaims Sir Robin suspiciously.

"I means, Sir," fires up Chock, "that My Lady ain't by way of telling me her matters. His Lordship, her father's down with his leg; Her Ladyship's mother is a-visitin' the sick in York. As they supposes, Sir, Lady Peggy is in Kent,

also, a-visitin' the sick, Her Ladyship's godmother."

Chockey curtsies and turns to the door, out of which Sir Robin reluctantly goes, putting spurs to his horse, dining at the Mermaid and then chartering a post-chaise to take him, sans delay, to Kent.

He crossed but one traveler on his way from Kennaston Castle to the village inn; a man of stout and comely build on a steed that took even Sir Robin's dull eye, so was its blood and lineage marked in its long splendid gait.

This horseman too pulled rein at Kennaston, sprang from his saddle, and, as Bickers hobbled up to take his beast, Mr. Grigson, for 'twas he, jumped up on the steps and caught Chockey's apron-string just as it was fluttering in the closing door.

"Hey, missus!" cried he, twirling Chock about and chucking her under the chin, which was rewarded by as smart a slap as that which had erstwhile burned Sir Robin's cheek.

"I must see Lady Peggy Burgoyne on the spot, without ceremony or a-waitin' 'ere coolin' my heels.

I've a letter for Her Ladyship meanin' life and death to my master, Sir Percy de Bohun."

"Have you?" says Chock, looking with admiring eyes upon the smart livery of Mr. Grigson, dust and mud-stained though it was.

"Yes, straight from London town, where 'pon my life, there's no sweeter mug than hers I sees before me now!"

"Lawk!" cries Chock, appeased. "But my mistress is from home."

"Not here! where is she then? A-visiting in the neighborhood?" Mr. Grigson turns on his heel and chirrups for his mount.

"No," returns Chockey. "She ain't."

"Well, whereabouts is she? For if it's as far as the Injies, Grigson's bound to find her and deliver this love-letter!"

"I don't know where she is, Sir," whimpers Chock.

"There, there! Don't be a-cryin' and a-sobbin', Duckie, I ain't gone, yet! Go ask His Lordship the address; bring me a mug of ale, and I'll give you a kiss."

"Drat you, Sir," cries Chockey. "Don't you be

talkin' like that!" Yet sidles she quite cozily in the encircling arm of the admirable Grigson.

"His Lordship, nor Her Ladyship, nor no one else knows where my mistress is."

"What! eloped? Scuttled! Flown the nest! When? How? Where?" cries Sir Percy's man thunder-struck. "She ain't gone with Sir Percy! Can it be with Sir Robin McTart?"

Chockey shook her head vigorously.

"Look a-here," says Mr. Grigson, now regarding the girl attentively. "Damme, but you knows where she is. Tell me and I'll give you two kisses and ten pounds to boot."

"Oh, Sir!" cries Chock, pushing away both kisses and pounds with one and the same hand. "I does know; leastways I knows my young lady's up in London, but whereabouts in that pit of sin and willainy, I can't say, nor who she's with, nor how long she's goin' to stop; only she charged me make His Lordship and Her Lady mother believe she was gone to Kent, back again to see her godmother. There! I've been bursting to tell some one, and you'll swear you'll keep it secret, won't you, Sir?"

Grigson obligingly nods and caresses Chock's arm.

"Thank the Lord it's out o' me!" adds she.

"Amen," ejaculates Sir Percy's man with fervor, at the same time fixing a contemplative and shrewd eye on his companion.

"Her Ladyship up in town,—where, with whom, you doesn't know; her father and mother thinks she's in Kent; and you're cock-sure she ain't runned away with Sir Robin McTart?"

"That I am!" cries the girl, warmly. "Little squint-eyed monster!"

"Eh?" exclaims Mr. Grigson, who had beheld the supposed Sir Robin at Kennaston's rooms the night before last, and clearly recollected that no such description fitted the slim, elegant, handsome young buck who had got a prick in the wrist from his own master's rapier.

"Monster! I said," repeats the girl. "Hist, I'll tell you more," says she, drawing close, hand over mouth. "You've seen the puppy. He was here anon, a-askin' and a-tearin' as to where My Lady was!"

Grigson stares.

"Aye, you must have met him on the road not ten rods off the Castle gates, for, as you galloped in, the undersized cockatrice cantered out. Lady Peggy wed with him, indeed!"

Grigson is now (recalling his having crossed a small squint-eyed gentleman as he came) morally certain that Chockey has been well drilled in her part, and that Lady Peggy has indeed run away up to London with Sir Robin McTart. So much for his thoughts; he says:

"I did. Fortunately I beheld the personage what you describes. Your humble servant, missus. I must be off and no time for love-makin' to-day," turning quickly on his heel and tossing sixpence to Bickers who holds his bridle at the stone.

"I ain't 'missus,'" remarks she plaintively.

"But you will be some day, lass, or my name ain't James Grigson. Here's to you and many thanks for putting me on the right track!"

"Tush, Sir! For the love of heaven and of anybody else you thinks a deal of, find my young lady!"

"Trust me," flings Mr. Grigson from his saddle.

"I'll find her and him as holds her in durance wile!"

Kissing his fingers to Chockey, off puts Sir Percy's own man to the Mermaid; stables his horse; hires a fresh one; claps spurs, and up to town as fast as four spavined bay legs can carry him, firmly convinced that he has solved the greater portion of the mystery, and that his master's lady fair is indeed, beyond a doubt, the bride of the gallant Sir Robin, or mayhap his unwilling prisoner.

VII

In which is set down how My Lady is whisked off to a rout, willy-nilly, at the home of her hated rival.

Mr. Brummell was a most shrewd and an altogether kindly personage as well; he had easily, on alighting from his carriage and assisting Lady Peggy to do the same, espied the disreputable looking parcel which the supposed son of his dear old friend vainly tried to conceal; and the Beau was not long of putting two and two together, and of concluding that young Sir Robin had lost his all at play, and had even perhaps pawned his wardrobe,—saving the ill-looking bundle—for the price of his last few days' food. Therefore it was, that, in the most obliging manner, he not only installed

Sir Robin in an elegant and spacious apartment, but vowed he would at once send for both his tailor and perruquier to wait upon him, and ended by assuring his guest that his own man Tempers would be up presently to make the young gentleman's toilet for him.

"Your pardon, Sir, Mr. Brummell," quoth Peggy, while her maiden heart set off at such a race-horse flutter as it seemed must never quiet down. "But, pray you, remember I am country-bred, unused to town ways, have never had a man to wait upon me in my life" (the solemn truth!) "and should never know how to comport myself in such altered conditions."

The Beau shrugged his shoulders in the French fashion, lifted his eyebrows, thought 'twas amazing strange that Sir Hector's son should have been so ill educated; said:

"Your pleasure, Sir, whilst under my roof, shall be mine; nor can I misdoubt but that one who has had the genius to invent that tie is amply able to array and perfume himself, even to the dressing of his own wig."

"You flatter, Sir, I protest!" answered the

guest. "I await with impatience the moment when, in cleaner case, I may have the honor of instructing you in the intricacies of the knot you are good enough to admire."

With any number of bows, the distinguished host closed the door, and My Lady Peggy was left to herself.

For a moment she stood quite still, her heart yet a-clapping madly in her bosom, her eyes wandering about the princely room in which she found herself, and at last resting on the mirror wherein was reflected her own slim figure, tricked out in Kennaston's suit of gray velvets, and in the yellow wig, which was indeed the counterpart of the real Sir Robin's pate. Her countenance?—sure none would recognize it since neither twin nor quondam suitor had—was dark with the coffee-stains; her eyes were ringed with sleeplessness and unaccustomed wine; her general aspect that of a young gentleman very much the worse for whatever his most recent experiences might have been.

Peg laughed, then she cried, then ran to the door and fastened it securely; then untied her bundle when out fell night-rail, green hood and

kerchief, powder, patch-box, lavender, musk, pins, needles, red silken hose, Levantine gown, and veil of Brussels lace. She shook the skirt out of its wrinkles, laid off her wig and 'broidered waistcoat; unpinned her long plaited hair from its coil, and was stoutly making up her mind to brave all, get into her petticoats, and confess everything to Mr. Brummell. But, as she was about to wash the dark stains from her face, comes there a "rap-a-tap" at the door, and Peg, dropping the ewer, calls out fiercely:

"Who's there?"

"An it please you, Sir Robin, Mr. Brummell bids me say to you that Mr. Chalk, the tailor, a person of the best fashion, will have the honor of waiting upon you for your measurements in a quarter of an hour, if you'll be pleased to see him then, or later?"

Peg hesitated; there was a battle fought within her those sixty seconds wherein all that was noblest and best struggled and strove to know which was the right thing to do; nor could she determine, save that, at second thought of confiding her sex to Mr. Brummell, it appeared to her she could not.

"I shall be ready to see Chalk, I thank you, in fifteen minutes, more or less," humming a tune with elaborate carelessness, rolling up the Levantine, the hood, veil, and night-rail into a ball, and pitching them into the chest of drawers; disposing the powder and perfumes and pins on the dressing-table; throwing the needles and patches into the fire; untying the kerchief and taking out soap, scissors, brushes.

"'Tis clear as water, I'm to be a man yet awhile," whispered she. "Heaven grant it may not be long! So!" seizing the scissors and shaking out the locks. "Snip! clip, and away with you! that I was once vain of, because a vile deceiver named Percy vowed he loved you!"

And off came Peg's hair, the which for silly liking of she stuffed into the drawer beside the Levantine and let fall a tear or two. Then snip, clip again as she had often done for her twin; so that, in no time at all, her head, with its short curly locks brushed back at this side and that of her broad forehead, had all the aspect of a man's.

"There," cried she, sweeping the last litter of her black tresses into the flames. "An I be a gen-

tleman, I'll be a gallant one. I sighed once to taste the sweets of bein' of t'other sex for only one-half an hour.—Zounds! as daddy'd say, would that I'd never quit my frocks. What hath it bettered me? To behold with mine own eyes the charms of her who's routed me from his heart; to hear him a-pledgin' me just to please my brother, and for the sake of spitin' Sir Robin McTart; to get myself into a position that makes me burstin' with shame and feelin' sure I can never hold up my head again in this world. Me, that's always loathed a hoyden! and even have I the muscle of a lad, and can I stride a horse, and jump any ditch was ever dug,—yet, yet,—oh! How did I ever bring myself to put on *these?*" And My Lady Peggy slaps her breeches with a whack, and promptly falls upon her knees a-praying for her father and mother, and brother, and Sir Percy, and Chock, and Bickers.

"And, Oh God, high up in Heaven, forgive me for all my wilfulness and jealousy and foolhardiness, and stealin' my twin's clothes; and deceit, the which has got me into this foul station, wherein I have told naught but lies—and I do

despise lies,—they are most disgustin' and utterly wicked. Forgive me for all the horrible sins I've committed—"

Footsteps now resound in the corridor and the voice of Mr. Brummell's own man says blandly:

"This way, Mr. Chalk," as he raps gently at the door.

"—And for all those I shall have to commit!" concludes Her Ladyship, as she springs to her feet and unfastens the door, admitting the tailor *a la mode.*

That night, the suit of grays well brushed, her wig re-curled, and her pocket-napkin richly perfumed, her mother's Brussels veil stripped up and made into a cravat of so ravishing a device as caused her host almost a spasm when he beheld it, Sir Robin McTart sat at honor-place at dinner, and was, to make a long story short, the cynosure and toast of the occasion.

The duel with Sir Percy, the rescue of My Lady Diana, the invention of a cravat, the nimble wit, the handsome face, soon bespoke Peggy into a favor, that, considering all other things, was well-nigh incredible; and when, the following day, she

appeared in one of the suits Mr. Chalk had made, with a dash of powder on her wig and a bronzed complexion due to surreptitious purchase at the players' cosmetic shop in Drury Lane, of sundry brown, red, and black pastes while making feint of being a comedian, the satisfaction of her host was unbounded.

"Robin, my boy," said this one, with a side-glance at his guest, "an you're a bit short of money, I'll put a few hundreds to your account at my banker's. Young gentlemen will be wild and spendthrift at times; London's new to you I fancy, and—"

"I thank you, Mr. Brummell, from my heart," returned Peg, "but I've three hundred pounds now idle in my pocket. That will last me, I'm confident, until I reach home, and, by your leave, I'm thinking I'll quit town this evening."

But Mr. Brummell has no ears for any such scheme. The Beau's erratic fancy has not been caught by a new object for the mere sake of losing it; his joy in the dash and buoyancy, the originality and naïvete of his latest discovery is genuine,

and no argument, of the very few Lady Peggy can offer, but he breaks down at once.

"Zounds, Sir! Are you a fool, Sir? Your sire was not one before you. To have half London a-talkin' about you; all the prints a-chronicling your movements; all the ladies a-dying for a glimpse of you, and you only up in town these few days; and a-proposing to go back and bury your talents for tying Brussels, in Kent! Fie upon you, Sir! I listen to no such whims. Here's my basket loaded with invitations for you already. Lady Brookwood's rout to-night!" with a sly glance at Peg's really blushing face; "Lady Diana Weston's mother, as you are doubtless aware? The Charity Bazaar at Selwyn's to-morrow; dinner at Holland House; Almacks's, and my own little plan for next Thursday which is an outing to my seat in Surrey a-horseback; dinner, bowls, a look over the stables, and home by the light o' the moon. 'Back to Kent,' forsooth! No, Sir, not yet."

A few hours later, as Lady Peggy got into her magnificent suit of crimson satin, gold embroidered; as she beheld her image in the glass and caught the hilt of her sword in her hand, the blood

that surged over her face and throat was ruby-red; and, at her wits' ends for what to do, the girl's tears forced themselves to her eyes once again.

She was to be off soon to Lady Brookwood's; here she should encounter not only Lady Diana, but doubtless Percy himself; mayhap Kennaston, if he had been able to get him a decent coat to wear in place of the gray velvets! Doubtless, too, all those others she had met in Lark Lane.

For the hundredth time she cast wildly about in her mind as to how she could, now at this present moment, rid herself of the hated disguise, get into her Levantine, get home to her mother's arms, hide her head forever, and never, no never! look into face of man again!

But Peggy saw no road. Every path seemed barred, save those that would forever damn her in the eyes of foes and friends alike.

"Oh," cried she in desperation. "How easy 'tis to get into breeches, a coat, a waist-coat, and a wig, but God ha' mercy! will I ever be able to get out of 'em?"

It is to be put down to the credit of My Lady Peggy's up-bringing in the country with most

times only a lad for her playmate, that now she bore herself with not only a fine ease and grace, but also with as splendid a swagger and daring as any young macaroni that carried a sword.

"An I'm to be a man, I'll be one!" cried she, "and if Lady Diana ogles, lud! I'll give as good as she sends. Little him as I love'll know, 'tis of his sometime Peggy he'll be jealous!"

So it was with a prodigious fine flutter of her napkin and a mightily impudent twirl of her eye-glass (purchased not two hours since), that Her Ladyship made her bows and kissed the finger-tips of Lady Brookwood's handsome daughter.

"I am your most grateful, Sir Robin!" cried this one, "and more pleased than I can express to welcome you. I only regret that Lord Brookwood is at Brookwood Hall, and not here to thank you for rescuing his daughter." And so forth and on, with presentations to a dozen of fine ladies, dowagers and damsels, and a precious lot of fine gentlemen; and it seemed to Peggy, in her simplicity, as if the whole of Mayfair were a-bowing and scraping and making her out a hero,—which indeed was not far off the fact.

Two watched her as she came in on Beau Brummell's arm. These were Sir Percy and Kennaston; one green with anxiety for Grigson's return from his errand, jumping at every sound; having left word both at Lark Lane, his coffee-house, as well as at home where he had gone, that Grigson should report to him at once he arrived; the other green with envy of Peggy and any other who neared his divinity, yet afraid and too diffident to approach her closer than with the devouring gaze of his eyes.

"That damned puppy again!" cries Percy, under his breath, as he surveys Peg in her satins. "By Gad, Sir, every lady in the room's turning spite eyes on t'other, your incomparable Diana included, for fear he won't stop and pay her a compliment."

"Ah," sighs the young poet. "Percy, an you loved like me 'twould be bliss to even gaze upon your fair. Think you I dare make bold now to cross and make my bow?"

"Why not?" returns the other gloomily. "Forgive my humor, Kennaston. Truth is, Sir, I'm mad, mad for Peg, and my ears are cracking and my brain splitting until that rascal, Grigson, gets

back with answer to my letter. He's been gone long enough to have made the journey four times over!"

"Oh, Percy," returns Peg's twin. "I love you as a brother, an could I but physic Your Lady into complaisance, I'd give my life for it. What owe I not to you?" adds the young man with deep feeling. "You've fed me, and zooks! Sir, to-night you've clothed me, for since the scurvy knaves that frightened Lady Di stole my suit of grays and my sword and hat, what had I left? Where would I be now, were't not for you?"

"Tush, Ken, lad, I love you for yourself,—and ten thousand times more for her sake. Ken, I love her so that as I told her, if Sir Robin were a better man I'd cry off, an she said she loved him."

"What said she?"

"Not that she loved him, but that she might," he continues with sadness, as his eyes follow Peg on her almost royal progress about the drawing-rooms. "'Tis a proper fellow, enough, and I'd always heard he was a fright and a coward."

Kennaston presently took heart of grace and

crossed to pay his duty to Lady Diana, who, 'twas plain to be seen by every other than this bashful swain, was by no means the indifferent to him she would feign play off. Her color came and went as Kennaston, blushing to match his lady, ventured to spout his ode to her; and, leaving the pair to gallop on this pleasant path, Sir Percy at a distance unconsciously followed Lady Peggy, at least with his gaze.

Peggy meantime, denying right and left the story of her prowess, with quips and jests and ogles of the fair, still kept her eye on Percy. Not yet had she seen him approach Lady Diana; yet hold! even now, catching her own gaze fixed upon him, he turned and was presently bending over the little beauty's fingers.

A pang shot through Peg's heart, and the tears were like to force their way; she made an excuse and left the long drawing-room, taking refuge in a small apartment where the tables were ready for cards. She sank into a chair and buried her face in her hands. The candles were not yet lighted and she was totally unobserved. Dashing the salt drops from her lashes with her hand,—

"What am I!" she cried in her bitterness, "that I can not abide to even see him a-bending over her hand! Ain't you no spirit, Peg? No pride? He's not thinking of you, my dear; didn't he say plain, if Sir Robin was the better man he'd give up to him! What kind of a suitor's that, Peg? Lud! I'd not give up him to any one, whether they were my betters or no!"

Could My Lady but have postponed her exit for a few brief moments she would have beheld Sir Percy, at a word in his ear from a footman, quit Lady Diana's side with but the smallest ceremony, dash out into the vestibule, seize with a vice-like grip the man who stood there pale and trembling, and gasp out:

"At last! the letter, the letter?"

Grigson shook his head and got even whiter.

"No letter?" Percy says in a dazed way.

"Only your own, Sir Percy," handing back the missive. "Her Ladyship was from home, Sir."

"Well, what of that! you infernal, damned rascal, did I not command you seek her, if 'twere at the other end of the world!"

"Aye, Sir, and the quickest way of settin' about

findin' Her Ladyship was for me to get back to town, Sir, as fast as the cursed beast I was cheated into hirin', Sir, would fetch me."

"Speak out, for God's sake! Is Her Ladyship up in London?" asked Sir Percy, actually shaking with impatience and astonishment.

Grigson nods and without more ado proceeds to give an exact if somewhat rambling account of his entire experiences, from the moment he had quitted his master until the present.

'Twere idle to attempt to describe Sir Percy's state of mind. Up to now there had ever lingered in his heart the hope, nay, one of those unconscious beliefs men have, that in the end Peggy would be his. This news that Grigson brought crushed every such thought from his brain, but put in its place such a hatred of the young man now tasting the sweets of hero-worship (in little), in the adjoining room, as caused his fingers to itch for his steel and t'other's flesh to meet once more, and to the death.

He drew Grigson in from the vestibule and, unobserved in the crush, down the corridor to the

darkness of the card-room where Peggy still sat disconsolate in her far-off corner.

She, for the moment, is even unconscious that any one has entered until the voices arrest her attention.

"By Gad!" Sir Percy cries in a low tone, falling into a seat and clapping his brow. "Up in London! The woman, vowing Sir Robin had crossed your entrance, inquiring for Her Ladyship! Your meeting, not Sir Robin, but an ill-conditioned little popinjay with squint eyes and of the height of the dwarf that waits upon my Lady Brookwood?"

"Aye, Sir Percy," returns Grigson. "No more like Sir Robin, which, Sir, begging your honor's parding, is a very pretty young nobleman, with a good eye and a proper height."

Sir Percy nods.

"Then," speaking as if to himself and motioning the man away, "since she's up in town without her parents' knowledge and with a cock-and-bull story stuck into her Abigail's mouth, it must be she's eloped with the scoundrel out of Kent!"

Grigson going, ventures to ask: "Any more

h'orders, Sir Percy? Will I cover the town, all the inns and taverns, Sir?"

The young man shakes his head and the servant bows himself away.

VIII

Wherein Lady Peggy picks a very pretty quarrel with her presumed rival: and is later bid to Beau Brummell's levee in her night rail.

At this precise moment Lady Peggy, scarce able to contain herself longer and, reckless of every possible consequence, being about to cast herself upon her quondam lover's protection, and to be rid forever of being a man, is stopped short of her purpose by the words that now fall slowly from the young man's lips.

"To deceive! to lie! to scheme! and plot, and bring shame and trouble upon her father and mother! Gad's life!" Sir Percy brings his clenched hand down with a thump upon the card-

table. "I had never believed that of Peggy! I'd have felled him that had hinted she could even plan a lie, or run off to a secret marriage with the best man that lives."

At which speech My Lady's color burned as never before since she was born, and her choler rose at the double charge, both the one that was true as to her deceit, and the one that was not as to her secret nuptials.

Palpitating with rage and wounded sensibility, with remorse and wretchedness; brought to bay with a situation she could not endure, Peg now utterly forgot her breeches or her shame at these, and, stepping boldly forth into the small circle of light shed in at the doorway, from the candles in the corridor, she saluted Sir Percy and spoke:

"I bid you good-evening, Sir Percy de Bohun, and, having had either the good, or the ill fortune to unintentionally overhear your remarks concerning Lady Peggy Burgoyne, I feel it my duty and pleasure alike to defend her from the unjust and unworthy attack which you, Sir, have just been pleased to make."

"Sir Robin McTart!" exclaims Percy, with a

start and in a prodigious anger. "I deny your charges, Sir, and would remind you that eavesdroppers are ever the cumberers of dangerous ground."

"Sir!" responds Lady Peggy, her temper rising the more at the sense of the injustice and falseness of her whole tenure. "You coupled just now the name of a lady with that of Sir Robin McTart. I demand how you dare to assume such a responsibility, Sir, until at least either the lady in question, or I, gives you our confidence, or our leave."

"'Our' forsooth! 'Our!'" comes fiercely from between Sir Percy's clenched teeth, while his hand flies to his sword-hilt.

"Why the devil, Sir—an you've been so lucky as win the lady for your bride—make off with her i' the dark, shut her up in some unfindable hole? cheat her parents, and go strutting like some vain peacock up and down other ladies' drawing-rooms? Be a man, Sir, and publish your triumph broadcast, nor let the town presently go gossiping and countryside wagging with the scandal of an elopement! Zounds! Sir Robin McTart, that!" flipping a stray card from the table almost in Her Lady-

ship's face, "for your gallantry and your honor!"

"What do you mean, Sir?" cries Peggy, struck with horror all a-heap, and with terror as well, yet keeping up a brave show with her drawn rapier and sparkling eyes.

"Whatever you damned please, Sir," returns Percy, now white-heat too, and most reckless of time or place.

"I've too much regard for Lady Peggy, Sir, not to postpone the climax of this matter until our next meeting, let it be when you see fit!" cries Peg with woman's wit and wisdom too.

"'Slife, Sir, I ask you as one gentleman to another, nay, I implore it of you," cries Sir Percy, rent betwixt choler, love and apprehension, "most humbly, is Lady Peggy your wife?"

Her Ladyship was now like to laugh, so near akin are mirth and sorrow, but she replied very loftily:

"I decline to discuss the matter, Sir, and would remind you that report hath your attentions engaged in quite another direction."

"You know where Lady Peggy Burgoyne is at

this moment?" says Sir Percy hotly, determined to push his matter to its ending this very night, and almost crazed by his passion and its balking.

"That I do, Sir," returns Her Ladyship with a covert smile.

"Tell me, or I'll brain you where you stand." Percy makes an ugly lunge at his opponent with his fist, but merely as a threat.

"That will I not," says she firmly.

What might have further ensued is, at this crisis, put out of the question by the entrance of Kennaston, who, espying Percy the first, cries out joyfully:

"Percy, Percy, Lady Diana hath given me leave to tell you she consents—"

"Tush, Sir!" interrupts Percy, jerking his head toward the other occupant of the room. "Sir Robin McTart and I have come near to blows, and must fight of a surety, on the subject of your sister, Sir; and 'tis for you to know without more delay that Lady Peggy is up in London, unknown to her parents; that Sir Robin hath her whereabouts and absolutely refuses to reveal the same." Percy

crosses the room, strikes a tinder and lights the candles on the mantel-shelf.

"You are cursedly badly mistook, gentlemen, both of you," says Kennaston, quietly enough. "I've got a letter which I found upon my table this very night, just come from my sister at Kennaston," with which her twin pulls My Lady's most ill-spelled and crumpled missive from his pocket and holds it up before the four astonished eyes that are staring at it.

Peggy in amaze recognizes the letter she had written to her brother the day long since in the buttery, and which she had taken up to town in her reticule and must have dropped when she had paid her ill-starred visit to Kennaston's chambers in Lark Lane.

"Frowse, the charwoman's daughter, vowed she'd found it a-lying in the entry under the water-tub. There's an end of your dispute, Sirs, I trust," glancing from one to the other. "Come, come, Sir Percy, and you, Sir Robin, whom indeed the letter you brought me from Lady Peggy the other night doth most highly commend to my good offices, must be friends," taking a hand of each. "Nor let

Dame Rumor split ye asunder with her lies about my little twin's being up in town. Gadzooks, Sirs, the child's not a notion of a difference betwixt Mayfair and—Drury Lane! I beg of you, Mr. Brummell," as this one now comes mincing in together with Lord Escombe, Sir Wyatt, Mr. Jack Chalmers and others for their game, "for you've the graces I lack in such matters.—These two gallants have had a difference, and 'tis you, Mr. Brummell, can set 'em straight again."

"Cards! cards! Spades, clubs, diamonds, hearts," exclaims the Beau, touching the Queen of Hearts with the toe of his high-heeled shoe, as it lies on the floor where it was shot from Sir Percy's hand.

"Split me! but 'tis them that are at the bottom of every quarrel, Sirs; whisk me, but if a spade, or a club, or a heart, provided it be a lady's, or a diamond, which the Jews have a lien on, ain't the only causes for disagreement in this world!"

"Correct as your own toilet, Sir!" cries Wyatt.

"Now, 'twas hearts of course, damn 'em, and the queen of 'em that's roused both your tempers, but for God's sake, gentlemen," taking now the hand of each which has slipped clear of Kennaston's

fingers, "bethink you, if the lady, whose name I can't even guess, whom you both adore, stood here, what would her pleasure be, Robin, my lad, answer me, for of brawling there can be none here and fighting no more. Speak, Sir!"

"Faith!" answered Lady Peggy, with splendid valor and a rise in her color and her heels, "to my certain knowledge the lady'd have her name put out of the matter wholly, and she'd sooner die, Sir, than have any fighting over her preferences, by either Sir Percy de Bohun or Sir Robin McTart."

The which being taken to be, by all present, a most prodigious and amazing gentlemanlike and politic speech, Sir Percy was feign accept, mock-smile and bow, while all the rest blew their lungs hollow applauding and praising his still hated and still suspected rival.

Peace restored outwardly, whatever else raged in the breasts of the two opponents, the gallants sat to their tables, Kennaston managing to whisper to Sir Percy across the deal:

"As I was telling you when I entered, Percy, Lady Di permits me to let you know she consents to my dedicating the ode to her, and Lillie, at the

corner of Beauford Buildings in the Strand, hath engaged to publish it at once!"

But this, Lady Peggy, at a distant table, engaged in picquet with His Grace of Escombe, hears not; there rings in her ears naught save the words Kennaston uttered when he came into the card-room —"Lady Diana hath given me leave to tell you she *consents.*"

"Consents!" To what else but his suit? Which, egged on by his noble uncle, has been pushing any time these ten years, since boy and girl Sir Percy and Lady Di had played, ridden, romped, quarreled as brother and sister together.

"Consents!"

It echoes and resounds in Her Ladyship's head over and over again the night through, and 'tis quite of a piece with her mood that she seeks out Lady Diana when tea and cakes are passing, and, with sly looks, congratulates Her Ladyship on the happiness she has this night conferred on a very gallant gentleman not so many miles away!

And quite in Lady Diana's line of reasoning, having heard from Kennaston that Sir Robin has come up to town highly commended to him by his

sister, and that, although he had been sorely jealous and distraught at the said Sir Robin's good fortune in the matter of the rescue of Her Ladyship, he still believed him to be head over heels in love with his twin, etc., etc., etc., and so, Her Ladyship argued, Kennaston had doubtless confided to the said Sir Robin such tokens of her favor as the said Lady Diana had that evening seen fit to manifest; never for a moment misdoubting that any other swain was in the supposed Robin's mind any more than he was in her own!

"*Consents*!"

'Twas reverberating in Peg's ears and a-knocking at her heart for the hundredth time, when, returned to the card-room, she learned that Mr. Brummell was inviting the company for the Thursday to his seat Ivy Dene. 'Twas to be a gentlemen's party only; out on horseback, the twenty miles, leaving the White Horse at ten in the morning, with luncheon en route at the Merry Rabbit at Market Ossory; a look over the stables and paddocks on arriving at Ivy Dene,—a quiet game, maybe, and such a dinner as only, the Beau swore,

his country cook could get up; with the ride back to town by the light of the near-full moon.

Lady Peggy was soon made aware that this festivity was solely in her honor, and succumbed to it as cheerfully as she might.

God keep her! All the while staring at the ribbon of her twin's wig, a-longing to cast her arms about his neck and pray him cover her up in his wraprascal and fetch her home; vowing she'd run away from 'em all the next minute, but where? How? Which way could it be done so that capture, discovery, and humiliation would not follow? Peggy could contrive no method, and the girl was literally terrified both at the prospect before her and by the realization that easy as it had been to jump into man's attire 'twas well-nigh impossible to get out of it again. Should she on returning to Peter's Court lay off her satin suit, wig, and rapier, and resume her Levantine gown, hood, petticoats, patches, and reticule, how and of what hour of the day or night could she in safety leave the mansion and find her way unsuspected to the King's Arms and the coach? 'Twould be out of the question; servants were up and about at all

hours, and were a woman seen emerging from her room, what piece of scandal would not the next day ring from one end of the town to t'other.

With "consents" tattooing in her brain, My Lady recklessly put all the heart there was left in her into the present moment, lost a hundred pounds to Escombe with a fine grace; won five hundred with no more ado; laughed, drank a little wine, went home with her host at four in the morning, and fell heavily asleep.

At two of the afternoon the Beau usually held an informal levee attended by the more noted of the bucks and macaronis of the town; vastly entertaining half hours, wherein, while soundly abusing the newspapers for their being stuffed with lies, the company still eagerly devoured every scrap of gossip they contained; where the amount of frizz towering above Lady This's brow was measured and scanned, the better appearance of Lady That in the new-fashioned gown discussed; and the horrid aspect of the Hon. Miss So and So's toupee and her general resemblance to a malt-sack tied in the middle, talked over. This couplet and that comedy were torn to pieces by as many pretty wits as

chanced to be present, while Tempers dressed his master's wig in a corner and a footman and a negro page handed chocolate round in silver trays.

The Beau, himself, reclined on his great bedstead with its fine tester, a half dozen of pillows richly laced at his head; a flowered gown about his shoulders, his night-cap on, a coverlet embroidered by the Chinese over him, his snuff-box at hand, reading aloud from the damp and freshly arrived print whilst Sir Wyatt, Lord Escombe, Mr. Jack Chalmers, and a dozen more sat or stood, cup in fingers, 'twixt lip and saucer, hearkening, eager, to the news.

"'Tis by this on the tip of every tongue in town that there occurred last night at Lady B——d's rout an encounter (the second within a se'ennight), betwixt Sir P——y de B——n and a certain young gentleman from Kent whose handsome face, genteel manners, and dashing behavior, have conspired to place him in so brief a time at the very height of favor in society, and more especially in the eyes of Lady D——a W——n. It had been supposed that the affair recounted in these pages as having taken place in the chambers of Lord K——n of

K——n was on account solely of the above mentioned adorable young scion of a noble house. We are in a position to assure the world of fashion that such is not the case, and that both the unfortunate disputes betwixt these two gallants are to be laid to the door of Lady P——y B——e, sister to Lord K——n. Report hath it that Her Ladyship is in London; rumor contradicts report and avers that the fair one has not stirred from home. The issue is awaited with interest, as the verbatim account of an unsuspected elopement may be looked for at any moment. Safe to say the vivacious Lady P——y B——e, whom the town hath never had the pleasure of beholding, has succeeded in stirring Mayfair to its depths and has been the cause already of a very pretty pair of quarrels between two young gentlemen of the first quality."

"'Slife!" cried Beau Brummell. "Who now the devil's Lady P——y?"

"By the dragon, himself, I never heard that Kennaston had a sister!" said Lord Wootton and Mr. Vane at once.

"Yes!" exclaims Sir Wyatt, tapping his fore-

head, recollectively, "I do recall that Sir Robin McTart, the night we were at Kennaston's chambers, entered with the presentation of a letter of introduction from 'Lady Peggy Burgoyne to her brother,' and 'sdeath! 'twas, I believe, she about whom they fought, too!"

"Ha! 'tis not only Lady Di, then, that's at the bottom of their quarrel after all," says Mr. Brummell, reflectively.

"Where is the fair one?" asks Escombe. "Who knows that?"

"Faith! no one. Stop! Sir Robin must know, since 'tis for her he unsheathes twice in a week," cries the host.

"Where is he?"

"Bring him in!"

"Send for Sir Robin!" is the cry of the company.

"Zooks! Sirs, but our reputations as gallants are broken up, an we've not seen her of whom the prints speak thus!" says the Beau, adding at once:

"Tempers, my compliments to Sir Robin McTart, and beg of him to join us, for, at the least, a few moments. I know he's averse to early ris-

ing, but pray inform him to skip across in his dressing-gown and slippers, and night-cap, we've no ladies here about to ogle him!"

The which message being conveyed to My Lady Peggy a-sitting by the pulled-out chest of drawers, mournfully contemplating her long shorn tresses with barred door, arouses in her such a fever of sorrow as well-nigh chokes her utterance.

"Say to Mr. Brummell I'm asleep, Tempers, and crave to know his pleasure, the answer to which I'll send as faithfully as Morpheus will permit, by you for Mercury! Off with you!" and Her Ladyship softly stroked her locks, and for the thousandth time went planning her escape.

Peels of laughter, rattling of rapiers, click of heels, and now—

"Rat-a-tat-tat-tat-tat!" on the door.

"McTart! McTart! Up with you from betwixt coverlets and into your Persian quilt!"

"Out with ye, Sir Robin, or by Gad! Sir, we'll in, the fifteen of us! and rout you up from Morpheus's arms."

"Come, Sir Robin, dally no longer with sweet sleep; up, Sir, and bethink you of Beauty spelled

with a P-E-G-G-Y !" shouts Sir Wyatt, chorused by the rest.

At first clap of voices Peggy stuck her hair back into the drawer, jumped up, and stood, hand upon the dressing-table, her expression like nothing else so much as that of a fawn caught in a thicket.

"'Sdeath! Gentlemen, I pray of you, a few moments grace!" cries she, trembling from the knees down, for 'tis quite of the temper of the manners of the day that in a second more the whole company should batter down the mahogany and burst in.

"Three-and-thirty, an you like, Sir Robin!" says Escombe, who is soberer than the rest.

"Give us the whereabouts of Lady Peggy Burgoyne," shouts Mr. Chalmers, "and we'll trouble you no more 'til doomsday!"

"Lady Peggy Burgoyne!"

"Lady Peggy Burgoyne!"

"Where's Lady Peggy Burgoyne?"

"Where's Lady Peggy Burgoyne?"

"Where is the fair one for whom you and Sir Percy de Bohun have fought with blades and tongues, twice now, since this day last week?"

"Lady Peggy Burgoyne!" cried they in hot concert, joined in most lustily by the Beau from his bed across the corridor, and accompanied by the pounding of fifteen rapier points on the parquet, and thirty fists on the woodwork, as well as the demoniacal screams of the Beau's little negro and the parrot on his wrist.

"Tell us where she is!" came high staccato last from Sir Wyatt's exhausted lips.

"My Lords and Gentlemen!" answers Her Ladyship, standing close to the door enveloped from top to toe in a sheet over her night-rail. "Would to God I could!"

There was a ring of heartfelt truth in the reply, and its utterance was succeeded by a second's surprised pause.

The young bucks regarded each other with shrugs, pursed mouths, and interrogation points bristling in their eyes.

Mr. Chalmers, recovered of his surprise sooner than the others, says:

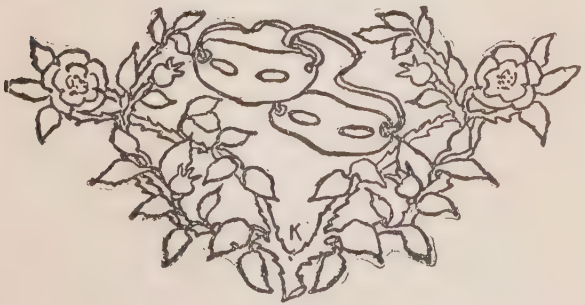
"Do you mean to say, Sir Robin, that the whereabouts of the lady with whose name the prints and the coffee-houses are ringing; for whose sake

you came near to fighting Sir Percy only last night, and did fight him in Lark Lane o' Thursday last, ain't known to you?"

"Is she in London?" pipes the Beau, pinching the little black till he squeaks again.

"That I can not tell," responds Her Ladyship. "I do know she's not in Kent; and she's not at Kennaston Castle. 'Slife! Sirs," adds she, "I pray your consideration. Guess what you will; this matter of Lady Peggy sticks me closer than you dream, and I'd give my life to know her safe at home with her mother."

Silence ensues; the disappointed fifteen get them back to the Beau's bedside to talk over this latest development as to the mysterious Lady Peggy.



IX

In the which Lady Peg overhears a horrible plot to murder; and wherein Mr. Incognito encountereth Sir Robin.

She herself falls into such an immediate flood of tears as shakes her well, and then up she rises from her depths, and with all the courage of her race and blood, she vows that, come another sunset she will quit Peter's Court as if for a walk, and never return; that in small clothes, since it must be, she will journey back to Kennaston Castle, and risk all the discomfiture and disgrace her doing so may bring upon her.

In point of fact, My Lady Peggy was at that state of mind when it seemed to her no degrada-

tion or humiliation, no sorrow that could be visited upon her, would be too much punishment, or enough, for the sins without number she had committed since the luckless day she took the coach for town.

When she emerged from her room for dinner, 'twas to learn that Mr. Brummell had been summoned hastily to St. James's on so important an affair as to initiate His Royal Highness into the mysteries of the new tie of Sir Robin's own invention! and that he trusted in this audience to obtain permission to fetch Sir Robin to the Palace and present him within a few days to several august personages, etc., etc., etc.

Her Ladyship, therefore, dined alone, scantily too; food choked her, wine burned her throat, and to speak truth she was heartily glad not to have to drink it, for Her Ladyship was an abstemious young lady and believed milk, Bohea and Pekoe the beverages for her sex, to the exclusion of any stronger.

At twilight, having made her duds and her tresses up into a reputable enough parcel, Lady Peggy, in a suit of claret velvet, leaving all the

rest of her man's attire hanging in the presses, sauntered carelessly out of the house, declining the footman's offer of a chair, or even a hackney chaise, or a page to carry her parcel, and set off at a swinging pace across the square and toward the river. It was her intention, by way of frustrating any attempts at tracing her which might be set afoot, the discovery of her flight once made, to so double on her own tracks, and to seek out such unimagined and unlikely streets to traverse, as must puzzle both bell-man, watch, and redbird alike, as well as her acquaintances.

She swaggered along toward St. Stephen's where a coach containing quality was occasionally met even now; then down Horseferry Road, almost to the river's bank; then along Jackanapes Row, with little idea of the cut-throat locality she was haunting; back again toward better neighborhoods; then a lurch to the Thames making into Farthing Alley and Little Boy Yard, at the end of which she found herself at the old Dove Pier.

Peg stood still, her heart beating both with her quick walk, and at the strangeness of all that surrounded her. She had no fear, because her arm

was stout, her aim sure, pistols at her belt and a good sword at her side; and she was perfectly ignorant of any harm here to be found, greater than at the door of Beau Brummell's house.

The dark dwellings of the yard frowned at one another, with not an ell of sky to share between 'em at their roofs; the sign of the "Three Cups" swung and creaked in the slow breeze; the river, black and gruesome, lapped at the foot of the stone pile against which she leaned. On the river the tired bargemen rested at their oars, and the dip of a water-bird was the only sound that struck upon her ear. Peggy was casting about in her mind whether to enter the inn and inquire her road to the King's Arms in the Strand, and had just turned to do so, when in the cavernous doorway of one of the gaunt-looking tenements she beheld three figures. The faces of two were toward her, and by the light of the fish-oil lamp swinging at the next-door tavern, she beheld them, so sinister and forbidding as to cause her to halt for a space, and then, overcoming her dread, to pursue her path, but slowly and by crossing the yard.

As she did so, her weapon caught in her heel

and as she bent to disengage it, a voice speaking in low muffled tones arrested her gait.

It was the voice of Sir Robin McTart saying:

"If I make it ten guineas apiece on the spot, you swear to leave him cold on the pier yonder, come Sunday night, or to tie a stone about his throat and throw him into the river?"

"Aye, aye," grunts one of the two companions of this most valorous gentleman. "'E's h'always 'ulkin 'ereabouts o' Sunday nights."

Lady Peggy, with such a pull-string of terror at her heart as she never had before, draws closer to the wall of the tenement before which she has halted, creeps nearer to the portal wherein these cavaliers are quartered.

"Let it be five guineas apiece to-night," squeaks the Baronet, "and the remainder when the business is done?"

"The devil knock you into hell with your, 'when the business is done!'" mutters the other. "We's doin' your job for you for little enough. Tain't everyone as'd h'undertake the funeral of a h'Earl's heir like Sir Percy de Bohun—"

Her Ladyship's like now to fall in a swoon; but

not she; only leans she a bit against the bricks, her bosom heaving, her eyes dilating, her lips bitten in until they are almost bleeding.

"Hush-h-h! no names, you varlets!" interrupts Sir Robin.

"Hey?" responds the other, "the walls ain't got no h'ears, and if they 'ad wot I'm a-sayin's the cussid truth, eh, Bloksey?"

Bloksey grunts.

"The town'll be afire when it's out that a gallant like 'im that's heir to Lord Gower's been done fer; and then, my fine gentleman, who's to pay for't, if we's caught and if we 'appens to be seen by any one when we're a doin' of your job? No, money all down now, or Sir Percy lives as long as 'e likes, for us!"

Peg's hand's upon the hilt of her sword.

Shall she spring and run Sir Robin through?

Shall she hide and buy the rascals out at a higher price than he has paid?

But no sooner do these thoughts rush through her brain than the utter impossibility of compassing the one, or of performing the other, undetected, if even with her life, and she so at the mercy

of these cut-throats, comes to steady her, and she realizes that her only part is to get away as fast as she may, and unseen if she can.

Meantime Sir Robin concludes his bargain with the two desperadoes, and as they withdraw into their haunt, and he turns on his heel, he espies Lady Peggy rounding the corner with her bundle under her arm. The little Baronet with a sidelong glance in at the hallway to make sure his men are out of sight, darts to the opposite side of the court on tiptoe, and then, putting hands to mouth, calls across softly, but clearly, in a tone half of joy, half anger.

"Mr. Incognito! Mr. Incognito! Ho! I say, Incognito!"

Peg stops short. 'Twere wiser perhaps to try to discover what had put Sir Robin McTart up to the murder.

"By Gad, Sir!" cries this one, making a dash now over to Peg's side of the way. "Here have I scoured the town for you day and night, and no trace of you anywhere! 'Incognito' me no more, Sir! Who are you, Sir? Damme! I'll stand no more such nonsense!" Sir Robin's valor's thor-

oughly based on the knowledge that, were blade to be unsheathed to his hurt, he could and would shout for his hirelings to the rescue.

'Twas the first and only time in his life that he was ever known to urge, or even hint, a quarrel *in propria persona.*

"I'll 'incognito' you to the end of the chapter, Sir Robin McTart," answers Lady Peggy, clapping hand to hilt.

"Very well, Sir, very well," says the Baronet, reflecting that another corpse might cost him ten guineas more, ere he were done with it; and besides yearning for the news of His Lady which he thinks he may glean. "I've small stomach for fightin' any man. Religion don't teach us that lesson, but 'tis a devilish trick you've played me, Sir."

"In what way, Sir? Out with it," replies Peggy.

"You, Sir, sent me to Kennaston a-seeking Lady Peggy Burgoyne, Sir; she was from home, and not a word else could I buy or wring out of her servant's cursed mouth. Then I hied to Kent, believing, from your fine messages to me from Her Ladyship, that she must be there at her godmoth-

er's. No, Sir! she was not; nor could any one tell but that she was at Kennaston Castle for all they knew. Back in town post-haste, I seek Lark Lane, where her brother lodges, so I had heard, only to learn that he has gone to stop with Sir Percy de Bohun, in Charlotte Street."

"Well, you sought him there?" inquires Peg quivering with suppressed excitement.

"I did not, Sir!" replies Sir Robin with emphasis.

"Thank heaven!" says his companion fervently, an exclamation which may do double duty, and is well taken by the little gentleman from Kent.

"No, Sir; you do not suppose, Sir, that I'm a-going to risk a life that's dear to Lady Peggy, at the hands of a ripping brawler and sure-kill like Sir Percy, do you?"

"Ah, Sir Robin," quoth Her Ladyship. "If you knew what a consolation it would be to Lady Peggy to hear of your unwillingness to hazard your precious person in such company, 'twould ease your mind and heart."

"Look you!" whispers Sir Robin, plucking at Peg's sleeve. "But tell me where she is? This

mystery 's killing me! How fares she? Does she pine for me? and is this true?" With shaking hands Sir Robin takes from his pocket a copy of a print of the day previous, and unfolding, reads to the astonished Peg the following paragraphs.

"Town's talk is all for the very pretty quarrel betwixt Sir P——y de B——n, and the gallant and handsome Sir R——n McT——t of Kent. 'Tis all over Mayfair, and far beyond, that the cause of the dispute's the lovely but mysterious Lady P——y B——e."

"'Slife!" interrupts Peg, catching at straws. "You now perceive, Sir Robin, why 'tis that Her Ladyship must keep her whereabouts a secret, even," she adds with sentimental deflection, "from you. Trust me, Sir, as you would trust her, and be guided by my counsel!"

Sir Robin nods vigorously, fluttering his sheet with anxious fingers. "Listen, Sir, listen, to this further." He reads on. "Sir P——y de B——n has sworn by all that's sacred, so 'tis said, to stick Sir R——n McT——t to the death, and serious consequences are feared."

"Ah!" cries Lady Peggy, overjoyed to hear any-

thing that may serve to keep the little Baronet and Sir Percy from meeting. "'Tis a gentleman of his word, I promise you. Better get back at once to Robinswold, and let London and Sir Percy gallop to the devil, an they see fit!"

"Nay," replies the one addressed. "Not I, Sir Incognito. It is not for a McTart to turn his back on danger, but the rather," and here by the fish-oil gleam, the little gentleman's squint eyes leer cunningly up into Her Ladyship's face: "The rather," continues he, glancing cautiously around, "take measures to protect myself."

"Very commendable of you, Sir Robin, by my faith," cries Peggy, although she shudders, now linking her arm in her companion's, and assuming an air of easy confidence, by the which she hopes to ensnare him into a complete revelation of his plans.

"Since you go armed, and are, I doubt not, a master in the art of self-defense, what have you to fear from Sir Percy de Bohun?"

"True," responds the Baronet, with a reservation to himself and no mind at all to proceed any further with his revelations. "Gad! Sir, a fellow

like that," clutching at the newspaper stuck among his ruffles, "ain't to be trusted as long as he's above the ground. I swear, Sir! I fear to walk abroad and hold myself housed at my inn in Pimlico, close, not daring to show my face. A ruffian that's publicly printed as seekin' life'd stick me in the back in the dark, an he got the chance."

"Nay, nay, Sir Robin," says Peg, up for her sweetheart, "he's not that sort of a gentleman—but, look you, keep close, frequent neither club, coffee or chocolate-house, or rout or drum; eschew Vauxhall, Richmond and the play-house, or any likely place where bucks gather, for trust me, Sir, an you do meet Sir Percy, there'll be the devil to pay, and his blade's his obedient slave."

Poor Peg! She has not only to protect Percy of his life, but, as before, to prevent any discovery of her usurpation of the little Baronet's name.

"Curse him! I fear him not!" responds this one, his itching fingers twisting about the empty purse in his pocket.

"But of Her Ladyship, Sir Go-between?" adds

he presently, as they emerge upon the broader and better lighted road. "'Pon my life, but to so find myself the hero of a romantic passion with the Lady secluded in a mystery, a nobleman thirsting for my blood, a nameless gentleman playin' Mercury betwixt me and my fair, 'tis amazing, Sir! prodigious amazing!" Sir Robin struts and takes snuff very comfortably, since he has got out of a very dangerous environment

Peg's soul sickens within her as she listens to him.

"Tell me now, how fares she?"

"Not so well," answers she.

"You've seen her?"

"Not I."

"Are like to?"

"No, Sir."

"You can convey messages to her by some fond way she's planned to get her news of me, eh?"

"I can, Sir Robin."

"Sir, whoever you are, for pity's sake, tell me where is she?"

"Not far, Sir."

"Gad, Sir, to touch her hand, her cheek!

You're in her sure confidence? She does favor me? She will not give me hopes, Sir, to turn around and break my heart by marryin' of another?"

"Lady Peggy'll never marry any man, Sir Robin, I'm of the opinion, so I'd not give that for your chances!" answers she.

"Think you she ever cared for Sir Percy?" asks he.

"Sir, who can fathom a woman's heart? 'Tis deeper than the sea; so deep, methinks, ofttimes she herself holds not that plummet that can sound it. Sir Robin, I take my leave of you."

"Hold! hold! Sir, not so fast. Where next may I encounter you?"

"That must be as Her Ladyship says," answers Peggy. "Your inn's in Pimlico?"

"Yes, the Puffled Hen, not far off Battersea Bridge."

"Farewell, Sir, and look you keep close in-doors, and risk no quarrel with Sir Percy de Bohun."

"Farewell, Sir," watching Her Ladyship turn down the street as he turns up. "Gad's life! 'twas well he happened when he did, and not earlier,

to eavesdrop my bargain with the wharf-rats! 'Sdeath! Risk no quarrel with Sir Percy! Not so long as there's guineas left to buy corpses with!" and the little gentleman trots over to Pimlico, tolerably well pleased with his evening's work; there, however, to be greeted with the reading of more newspapers, including that one which had earlier in the day so entertained Beau Brummell and his familiars.

Not for a moment did the Baronet mistrust, or have a suspicion, other than that his fame had caused him to be made the subject of such a pack of pretty stories as was then the custom of the press, as now, regarding any gentleman of position and gallantry. Sir Robin's vanity easily swallowed the dose, and he even slapped his thigh and laughed his little dice-rattle laugh, as he reflected how safe he really was with never a challenge or a brawl to his cowardly credit since he got his first flogging at Eton.

He actually mouthed over his prospective wooing, and assured winning of Lady Peggy, and felt a calm satisfaction in the knowledge that the one rival he feared would so soon be beyond the reach

of ladies' smiles or tears. No qualms came to disturb his genial enjoyment of purposed assassination. In those days to kill was nearer men's tempers than it is to-day. 'Twas with blackguard and man of honor alike, the first redress for even the pettiest sort of a dispute; with the difference of method only, that the gallant blade fought out his quarrel on the open field, while the craven bought a hireling's dagger to do it in the dark.

Meantime, My Lady, by as direct a route as she can fathom out of the labyrinth of her ignorance and her distracted state of mind, makes back to Peter's Court with her parcel of duds still under her arm.

She enters, mounts the stair-case, seeks her room, closes the door, and sits down.

"'Tis now not to be doubted," she says to herself, "but that the Devil's at the helm of my ship—and that I am to be a man for the rest of my life. 'Sdeath! as dad says, I'll stop over till Sunday night's o'er past, and as surely as my name's Peggy Burgoyne I'll foil that little dastardly groat of a Baronet's plot to murder him that I once l-loved. Bah!" cries she half aloud. "What's the

use of mincin' matters that's true? Him that I love! Even if he's dyin' for Lady Diana, and goin' to be her husband instead of mine! 'Consents!'" murmurs she, flinging herself on the bed in a flood of tempestuous tears.

In vain regretting, she now too fully realized that her own wilful words, her jealousy, her falsehoods, her deceits, were the sole causes for Sir Robin's terror, and, therefore, for the abominable scheme which he had just concocted.

Presently she arose, tossed the bundle once more back into its hiding-place, and set to pacing up and down the floor as she'd seen her twin do at home when he was looking high and low for a rhyme.

'Twas weightier matters kept Peg moving for an hour or more, and quick-spinning as were her heart and temper, her brain bore a more even balance.

First she had thought to warn Percy by a letter unsigned; the which she knew he'd pitch into the fire and think no more about. Then, that she'd write one to Kennaston imploring him to keep Percy from the pier Sunday night or any other;

this she soon recognized would have the fate of t'other. Then, 'twas to contrive some plan to fetch him to Richmond, Windsor, any place else for Sunday; but to this arose the objection that the blackguards cheated of one day, or place, would not fail to wait upon their prey some other. At the last, Her Ladyship's shrewd common-sense and indomitable pluck plainly showed her there was but one safe plan out of the danger; and this must be to go herself to the river Sunday night, and there concealed, armed, await the coming of the cut-throats from their den, and from the rear, put a shot into each at one and the same moment.

Could she do it?

Her Ladyship had muscles of steel, no nerves, as the fine ladies of her day comprehended them; as brave and loyal a heart as ever beat in any breast; good faith in God, for all her frowardness; and that species of love burning within her for Sir Percy de Bohun, which has, not a few times in the world's history, made frailest woman into man's equal for courage.

To Lady Peggy there seemed a divine compensation in the fact that it had come to her, to save

the very one whom, by her lies and wilfulness, she alone had been the means of endangering.

X

In this same Her Ladyship's mount is shot dead under her in Epstowe Forest, and she makes off on Tom Kidde's horse.

This young gentleman now stood looking from a window of his uncle's house, upon all the dewy leafing beauty of the Park at May. His brow was knit, his lips tight shut, his hand amid his ruffles clenched.

At the table sat Kennaston, inky-fingered, scribbling; eyes now rolling to the ceiling, now roving hither and yon.

"Ah!" sighs this one. "If the critics do not find this canto to their taste, may I be damned!"

"You're like to go to Court to the Devil, I'm

thinking then, dear lad," speaks de Bohun over his shoulder.

"Fame! Fame!" cries the young poet, pushing back in his chair, wig awry and quill poised in air. "I'll hunt thee to my dying hour, and if thou escap'st me then, 'twill all be Lady Diana's fault."

"How's that?" asks Percy, with, however, but small ring of interest in his voice.

"Oh!" exclaimed Peg's twin, "the minx mocks me! 'Tis Monday, kindness and all smiles, to wake on Tuesday for indifference; pouts on Wednesday; lure-me-ons o' Thursday; forgetfulness for Friday; radiance for Saturday, and all a-jumble, sweets-and-frowns! showers! sunshine! what you will!—and will not!—for my Sunday fare."

Percy sighs and smiles.

"Percy, sometimes I think Diana does love you!"

"No, Sir, never. We're like brother and sister, nothing else, save my uncle's absurd, obstinate (now-cured) whim, since childhood, to match his heir with Brookwood's heiress. Odzooks! Ken,

you're like every other swain that ever sighed, always looking for a rival to be jealous of! Lady Di cares for you; an you doubted it before, 'tis time to take up hope, since you are asked to Brookwood for a visit, and go popping off to-night, with me left home to think alone on Peggy."

"Zounds! Sir, 'tis not you only that's thinking of her!" cries the young man rising and crossing to the fire. "But, what would you! if I call out the bell-man, publish her disappearance in the newspapers; get word to my father and my mother; what comes of't all, but scandal? and like as not dad an apoplexy, and My Lady mother a set of fits and a death-bed!"

"Ken, I'm a damned fool ever to stop inside of doors or to cease pacing streets, haunting inns, shadowing Sir Robin McTart, until I find her!"

"Fie, Sir, if she's gone off with Sir Robin McTart, 'tis, I promise you, with a wedding-ring on her finger, and not else! An she loves him, what's to be said or done, if he's her lawful lord?"

"Naught. I myself went down to Kennaston yesterday. I said nothing to you, Ken," he adds,

noting the other's surprised and reproachful start, with a hand upon his junior's shoulder.

"I thought I'd not interrupt the epic and your frenzies about Lady Di, with my troubles."

"Well, what news of Peg? Any?" asks her twin anxiously.

"None. I saw Chockey, and only got from her what Grigson had, the positive assurance that her mistress had gone up to London. 'Of her own free will?' I asked. 'Yes, Sir Percy,' said she. 'Alone?' I inquired. 'No, Sir Percy,' was her answer, nor could I force, frighten, or buy the baggage into any further confidence. She did beg of me, however, seek out Her Ladyship, if I could, and find how she fared."

"Gad's life, Sir! She has eloped. 'Tis clear as crystal!"

"One thing more, I asked Chock: Had Her Ladyship money in her purse? 'Lawk, Sir Percy!' cried she, 'two hundred pounds I know of!'"

"'Two hundred pounds!'" repeats Peg's twin in vast amazement. "'Tis sure more'n she ever saw before in our whole lives put together. Oh, the girl's safely wedded, Sir, beyond a doubt!"

"Sir!" says Percy, sitting at the table, with his head low in his hands. "The blackguard's won her from me!"

"I fear so, Sir." The two men's hands meet and grasp in the silent fashion of their sex: oft-times more eloquent than any words e'er speeched.

"Would I had made a hole in his heart that night in Lark Lane!" cried Sir Percy next.

"Sir Robin's nimble, Sir, and knows a trick or two with steel, as well as dice."

"Aye: a gallant every inch; 'tis for that I hate him all the more; and yet, Ken, sometimes, lad, when I've been a-staring at him from afar, I've caught something in his countenance resembling Peg, and it's that's made me halt like a chit at provoking of him further."

Kennaston nods. "Aye: I've remarked it; but held my peace, Percy, for 'tis said man and wife often grow to look alike, and I doubt not, sometimes begin after the same pattern."

Sir Percy sighs again: turns up the room with drooped lids; in silence getting that grip upon his soul which noblest natures insist on with themselves, even in crises like his. 'Tis a bitter battle,

closer fought and quicker, too, than any won or lost with swords and guns. The struggle's writ upon his face as he goes; but when he comes his victory's writ there too.

"Kennaston," says he, very quiet and off-hand, "I'm thinking I'll go to the Colonies, to Virginia."

"What! no!" ejaculates the poet, placing a hand on either of his friend's shoulders.

"Yes, Ken, dear lad, I could not live in England without her; perhaps yonder, over the sea, in the new land that's growing up, I may learn to lead a new, better life, just for her sake that's lost to me forever. At the least I can strive, at such a distance, to serve my country and my King like a man—until the end I'll pray for comes."

Kennaston turns off, with tears in his eyes.

"Mostly," says he brokenly, "were not Peggy my twin, I'd be in a ripe mood for a-cursing of her! When, Percy?" asks he, after a pause.

"As soon as may be," is the reply. "I've the promise of a commission by my uncle's influence! Come, come, lad o' my heart," laughs he through his own misty eyes. "The wind's not in my ship's sails yet. I promised Mr. Brummell for his ex-

pedition to Ivy Dene for the morrow, and I'll hardly be ready in all points to get under way before you're back in town from your visit to Brookwood; whence I foresee you'll fly with Diana's 'yes,' betwixt her kiss on your cheek."

'Twas now Mr. Brummell's famous and long-talked-about party to Ivy Dene this very next day that dawned.

Now, Her Ladyship had vowed to herself that, come what might, she would avoid this, even did Fate keep her in London. 'Twas no part of her program, although she could do it as well as any sporting squire, to make for her future any such memory as riding a horse astride for thirty miles out and back, in the company a half-score of gentlemen must furnish; yet, so is each of us rather the creature of circumstance than will, that the hour appointed found Peg mounted on a gray with blood in his veins, and a-pacing down Piccadilly to the White Horse beside Beau Brummell's bay.

She could not, with Sir Robin's murderous pact in her perpetual view, make up her mind to omit a company that should include Sir Percy.

It seemed to her that any day spent by him out of her sight might prove fatal; that Sir Robin's hirelings might conceive it better to their purpose to put an end to their intended victim before the Sunday. So, aching with an insane but not unnatural impulse to pull rein and confess all; burning with shame to remember 'twas of Lady Diana's sweetheart she was thinking; mortified beyond belief every time her saddle grazed her breeches; intent lest an unsuspected sword should flash from the hedge-rows, the sheep-cotes, or the shadows of Epstowe Forest, which they traversed on their way; My Lady Peggy, wishing amidst all this that she had never come to town, yet contrived to display a very cheerful mien, to laugh as loud as she dared, keeping her high notes cautiously to herself, as she had in her speech ever since the night, as Sir Robin, she had made her first appearance in Lark Lane—to join in jest, quip, prank, such as a gay cavalcade of jovial gentlemen were then wont to indulge in.

Such are some of the strange vicissitudes incident to being that most amazingly delicious compound, a wilful and withal true-hearted woman.

As Mr. Brummell had planned, they halted for refreshment at the Merry Rabbit at Market Ossory, and left, after a game of bowls on the green, to pursue their way. Percy lingered a bit in the rear: truth to tell, his reflections were none of the gayest, and the presence of the supposed Sir Robin McTart, and the conclusion, which, together with Ken, he had been forced to reach, that Lady Peggy had run off with the Baronet, did not by any means conspire to the lightening of his spirits. As he watched his presumed rival, heard the ringing laugh, the brilliant jest: noted the careless air, and thought of this cavalier as Lady Peggy's lord, his choler knew no bounds, and it appeared to him that, come what might, he must invent cause of quarrel, and one or the other of 'em be left cold on the field.

"Why," a thousand times he asked himself, "this mystery regarding her marriage? Why not have wedded Sir Robin from her father's home, and with her father's blessing, since," Sir Percy reluctantly admitted, "no fault could be found with so fine a young gentleman; and his fortune, he knew to be considerable."

He was aware that Her Ladyship was romantic to a degree, and he could but decide that this predilection had caused her to elope and to preserve the matter in a wrapping of secrecy for a time; no doubt even now from her retirement looking forward to the hour when she should emerge as Lady McTart!

Sir Percy gritted his teeth together and struck his spurs so deep that his horse gave a plunge which brought him up, neck and neck, with the gray of the supposed Baronet, and the black of Mr. Chalmers.

"To the rescue, Sir Percy!" cried this one jocularly. "Your assistance I beg, and the loan of your wits in our argument."

"With all my heart!" answers Percy, scenting a possible chance to worst his rival, even in a battle of words. "What's the subject?"

"A truce to 't!" exclaims the Beau, with an expressive shake of his head at Mr. Chalmers, who, however, seldom notes any obstacle to the pleasure of his present moment.

"No truce at all, Mr. Brummell!" answers he gaily. "'Tis—"

"'Tis nothing whatever, Sir Percy," interrupts Lord Escombe, putting his hand on Chalmers's rein, and adding in an undertone: "Gadzooks! man, hold your peace. The matter's like tow and tinder betwixt Percy and McTart."

"'Pon my soul, Gentlemen!" now cries Percy, "I insist upon Jack's being allowed to proceed with his remarks. If he wants my counsels, they're his. Come, Sir, speak."

"'Tis but this," says Mr. Chalmers. "I say to Sir Robin that since the world's busy with rumors of his secret marriage to Lady Peggy Burgoyne; since as I learn (by my man, who had it at the gate of the very best authority—Gad! Sirs, 'tis a fact, even if we don't relish it, the gist of our gossip comes from below stairs, up!) that Lady Peggy is from home, her father believing her in Kent at her godmother's!" Mr. Chalmers smiles, "her mother being in York, believing her safe at Kennaston, I say, My Lords and Gentlemen, it behooves Sir Robin confide the matter to his best friends, and give them chances to congratulate him and the Lady. Have I the right of't, Percy, yes or no?"

Percy is silent for a moment: it seems to him a desecration of the sweet, modest and womanly girl he has so long adored, thus to hear even her name, much less a discussion of her most private matters, made into mirthful subject on a morning's ride.

His anger, too, is great that the man whose name is coupled with hers has not already put a stop to such a conversation, even were it at the point of the sword.

Shall he, here and now, so reply to Mr. Chalmers as shall breed an instant retort from Sir Robin, and a challenge on the spot? The wild thought even flashes through his brain that Sir Robin might, by the grace of God! be left dead on the ground, and that some time in the dim future he might win Peggy back to himself.

But, with a tightening rein, he checks himself, as well as his horse, as he answers.

"Mr. Chalmers, the Lady you name is one whom I honor most deeply, and it seems to me if she has seen fit to go into seclusion, or to marry secretly, that, while I may wish to God it had been in open church! I must continue to respect her preferences, until she elects to change them;" with

which, breaking the little pause of silence which follows, Sir Percy gallops ahead, joining Mr. Brummell, who has put himself quickly out of the commotion he had foreseen as likely to arrive.

Meantime, it may be correctly imagined that Her Ladyship, with all her sex's exquisite ingenuity at plaguing itself whenever it possibly can, had seized upon those words of Sir Percy's most easily twisted into a means of self-torture.

"I wish to God it had been in open church!" instantly stuck itself in her thoughts beside "Consents;" the two forming just that species of flagellation which ladies so situated in mind are wont to inflict upon themselves.

The supposed Sir Robin, from this on, until the arrival of the party at Ivy Dene, became taciturn, even morose, and not a syllable could be got from him in answer to the wildest gibes.

Her eyes intent upon Sir Percy, who now kept to the fore with his host, My Lady Peggy, on the keen lookout for the possible assassin, and to the tune of "consents," and its running-mate, "I would to God it had been in open church!" put in a very dolorous twenty miles; but, on dismount-

ing at Mr. Brummell's doorstep, she endeavored to infuse a little joyousness into her looks and speech.

Indeed, 'twas difficult; yet no more so to-day than any other since she had been coerced by circumstances into an acceptance of the Beau's hospitality. Every mouthful of bread and meat Peggy ate well-nigh choked her, as she remembered 'twas meant for Sir Robin McTart. She felt herself a trickster, a villain of the deepest dye, and yet saw no way out of her usurped character with honor and repute; no way of keeping in it save by the deeper dyeing of her soul in sin, which she promised herself, and heaven, to expiate as soon as Percy should be safe from Sir Robin's men.

The afternoon was spent as had been planned; the country cook's dinner was voted a perfect success: Mr. Chalmers, slightly raised by wine, even going so far as to send her down, with his compliments, his favorite ruby heart-pin: when, on the spot, not a gentleman present but whipped out a jewel from ruffle, finger, pocket or fob, and Peggy herself tying 'em up in a pocket-napkin laced

with Brussels and perfumed like the civet-cat, sent them down to the astonished lass in the kitchen.

A game of cards was in order after the repast: a tilt at politics: a wager on the question of tea in the Colonies; Lady Peggy and Sir Percy keeping, by the grace of each, well apart in all these encounters; and at twelve o'clock, just as the moon was rising behind a bank of splendid star-fringed clouds, Mr. Brummell and his guests set forth on their homeward road.

The beauty of the night was such as soothes and casts its own mantle of peace over even those unquiet spirits which may be abroad.

It reminded Lady Peggy, as she rode along, of just such another when she and Percy had wandered up and down together in the weedy gardens at Kennaston. Of that identical night Percy also was thinking, and of his wilful Lady's bright sallies, quick smiles, frowns; yea, even of one little touch of her red lips, light as thistledown, which now he seemed to feel the ghost of, on his forehead.

The cavalcade had left the highway some dis-

tance behind; the moon was fast being overtaken by the clouds whence she had, an hour or more ago, emerged; the dews fell thick, and the scent of the hawthorn was sweet in the air as they plunged into Epstowe Forest.

"Ah, Gentlemen," cried out Mr. Brummell, snapping his whip, "by Gad, Sirs, what a night for Tom Kidde and his merry men! the skies dark, the moon playin' hide and seek, fifteen watches and purses, and as many rings, pins and seals between us as you left not at Ivy Dene with my cook Elizabeth!"

"Ha! ha! ha! No fears of Tom Kidde, an he knows our caliber, jumping out upon us!" laughs Lord Wootton.

"'Slife! Sir, he's the sort of highwayman to jump out on the best mettle that strides horse-flesh or carries gold. The young devil's afraid of nothing that breathes, and has been the terror of travelers now these three or four years gone," says Vane.

"He's not above one-and-twenty, smooth-faced as a girl, those say who've caught a glimpse of him under his mask; dresses like a macaroni, voiced

like a choir-singer, and nimble as an Indian monkey!"

"Frequents he this neighborhood?" queries Lady Peggy, who at mention of the word "highwayman" has tightened her rein, clapped a hand on her holster, and felt her heart thump, as she involuntarily connects it with possible danger to Percy.

"That he does," said Mr. Chalmers. "His den, or one of 'em's somewhere in the depths of Epstowe; and no one can tell when or where he's like to turn up next."

"When did he turn up last?" says Sir Wyatt, laughing.

"I can tell you," returns Vane. "'Twas about Candlemas. I was down at home on a visit from town, when the news came, almost frightening my mother out of her wits, and setting the maids a-shivering like so many poppies in a storm. Tom Kidde had pounced on Lord Brookwood not a mile from his own gates, lifted him off his mount in the politest fashion imaginable, rifled His Lordship's pockets, appropriated his weapons, and ridden off on his victim's horse, leaving His Lordship tied to a tree at the roadside, where he was found

by Biggs, the J. P., the next morning, a-bellowin' and a-cursin' like a wild bull."

A hearty laugh greets Mr. Vane's description.

"Yes, but that ain't all of't, My Lords and Gentlemen," continues he.

"By no means!" cries Beau Brummell, out of his fit of hilarity. "I recall now, that I rode over from Lauriston Castle, where I was visiting, that very morning, and heard the adventure from Brookwood himself. I fancy he had the laugh, or will have it some day, on Tom, or some of his men, for the stolen mare was none other than His Lordship's famous 'Homing Nell.'"

"Is it possible!" exclaims Sir Percy, "the mare that's been taken off a hundred miles, let loose, and finds her way home again; the mare that's been sold and ridden fifty miles away, and then, when she felt a hand at her mouth she could master, has taken the bit between her teeth, and the one in the saddle's only sometimes been able to keep his seat, and let her take him straight back whence she came?"

"The very same 'Homing Nell.' Brookwood's

sure of her getting back sooner or later," says the Beau.

"They'll never catch Tom, though," cries Escombe.

"If they do," remarks Vane, "he'll hang not two hours after he's bagged; his death-warrant's been lying signed in Mr. Biggs's pocket-book any time this twelvemonth; and there's still a gibbet standing on the hill above Brook-Armsleigh Village!"

"Zounds! Sirs!" exclaims Mr. Chalmers, "what a life 't must be, tho'; sleep o' days, wake o' nights, prowling under the branches, harkening for game from dusk till dawn, all seasons the same, one's heart in one's mouth, till the hoof's heard, and then a masking dash, a brawl, a thrift quick as the lightning's flash; a corpse or two, and your purse the heavier by as many guineas as the game's had under cover—and all to the tune of the owl's cry, and I doubt not for some sweet Maid Marian's sake!"

"'Slife! hear the boy!" cries Mr. Brummell. "One would think him sired by a Jack Sheppard rather than by the gentlest Sir that ever lived.

For your froward tendencies, Sir, you shall pay a penalty."

"Yea, yea! a penalty! a penalty!" cry they all.

"In what kind?" returns Jack, waving his hat over his head.

"A song! a song!" they answer.

"Which one?" asks he, nothing loath, for his lungs are lusty and his reputation for singing above the ordinary.

"What you will," they answer.

"Well, then, what say you to 'Lady Betty Takes the Air,' since all can join me in the chorus?"

"Good!"

"Percy," says Jack, "you've a pretty pipe in your throat; give me the key, will you? not too high, you rascal, I'm not vainglorious at my music. So, and, so—there," as Percy does as he is asked.

When all the May is deck'd about
With hawthorn bud and blow;
When pinkly shows the heather's tip,
And harebells nod a-row—

GOES TO TOWN

Lady Betty takes the air,
Sing ah fa, la-la-la!
With a rush hat on her hair:
Sing ah fa, la-la-la!

When all the brown earth thrills to green,
When rivers laugh and sing;
When lark and thrush cajole and coax,
And all the wood's a-wing—
Lady Betty takes the air, etc.

When Corydon most sad, forlorn,
With wrinkled hose, distraught,
All flouted by his worshiped Fair,
Walks forth as one that's daft,
Lady Betty takes the air, etc.

When, at the turn-stile next the park,
The sad swain stops to sigh—
"No lady ever lived so dear
As she for whom I'd die!"
Lady Betty takes the air, etc.

When, as the sun walks up the glade,
And as the milkmaid hies
Across the paddock with her pails,
And as the lark doth rise—
Lady Betty takes the air, etc.

Cries Betty, flaunting past, "Oh fie!
A gallant all unkempt,
Such ungenteel and woful sight
Kind fortune me exempt!"
Lady Betty takes the air, etc.

When speaking thus, the May-breeze blew
Her rush hat o'er the stile,
And Corydon caught quick the gaze,
And swift his sigh turned smile,
Lady Betty takes the air, etc.

Thus, when the May is deck'd about
With hawthorn bud and blow,
Sweet Betty ties her hat-strings fast,
A gallant in the bow!
Lady Betty takes the air, etc.

'Twas ever thus, dear maids and men,
Whene'er ye walk abroad—
'Tis e'er the little breeze that blows
Each lady to her lord!
Lady Betty takes the air, etc.

Every one joins in the chorus with a hearty good will; all save Her Ladyship. Peggy dares not lift her woman's voice, lest Escombe at right, or Wootton at her left, shall hear its most unmannish

lilt. She mouths the words, though, and listens, as she has many a time before, to Sir Percy's tones, and wonders if the sentiment is making him think of the Lady Diana.

The Lady Diana, however, is very far from Sir Percy's imagination. He has been moodily ruminating on the possibilities of Tom Kidde (the most renowned desperado in all England of that day) suddenly bursting upon the party, and leaving a corpse behind him—that of Sir Robin McTart! He has been picturing to himself the profound pleasure it would give him to assist in fetching Sir Robin to the nearest church for decent burial, and the almost hilarious joy that would be his in attending his rival's body to the grave! These were, according to the strict code, most murderous thoughts, and yet how pleasant, if how altogether unprofitable they were also.

Mr. Chalmers is in the midst of his last verse, his voice echoing into, and back, from the depths of the great green wood; there is not a wisp of the moon visible by this, and no light, save the halo from her beauty which lines and rims the vast masses of clouds above them.

Peggy is listening to the song; she hears it well: also the crunch of her horse's hoofs on the narrow path; also, the crackle of the fresh twigs as they snap before the advance; and too, so sharp are her ears, the sleepy cheep of some disturbed bird in its nest, and, what else?

What is this curious stealthy stir, far-off, and creeping nearer in the wood?

And, hark! Peggy puts her hand to her ear to hear a subdued whistle, sweet, tuneful, under-breath, but patent to her sense, and too, to Sir Percy's.

Before either can move, or, indeed, had as yet gathered the impulse of even self-defense, into the midst of Mr. Chalmers and the rest, with their chorus, dashes a company of riders in masks.

A shot, low-aimed, and merely intended as a slight warning of what may be expected, should occasion demand, strikes the ground at Her Ladyship's right.

With remorse and reparation at his heart-strings —'tis the kind of man who could be but generous to his worst enemy—Sir Percy's horse is flung betwixt the supposed Sir Robin and the band.

"Good evening, My Lords and Gentlemen," says the leader, in a voice like a lute. "I thank you heartily for coming my way! Purses and watches, merry Sirs, jewels, trinkets, snuff-boxes, if of gold, pins, fobs, seals, these are all the toll I demand, and shall be forced to collect, if you show any disposition to deny."

It might be wisely argued that, while this speech was being made, any gentleman might have either run the highwayman through, or put an ounce of lead into his heart, but the fact of the matter was, each gentleman found himself face to face with another gentleman who held a blunderbuss up to within three inches of his nose.

My Lady's first thought had been that Sir Robin's men had not waited for the Sunday night to come, but presently she recognized the truth, and, stung by the fact that Sir Percy had put himself between her and danger, she was the only one of the whole company who stirred in her saddle other than to do the bidding of Tom Kidde.

While the rest were busily engaged in emptying their treasures, she, making feint to do the same, says very low and tauntingly to Sir Percy:

"Had I but one to show fight with me, I'd ne'er give in to these scoundrels."

"As soon done as said, Sir Robin," whispers Percy. "No man can say I'm his lesser in courage!" with which he wrests his bridle from the blackguard whose hand's upon it, whips out his sword with one hand, picks out his pistol with the other, grips his reins in his teeth, and strikes with steel and shot, both at once.

Peg's his match, imitating him with such a will as sets every gentleman of 'em a-shooting, a-lunging and a-cursing with all the arms and breath he's got; and sets the robbers for a second to their wits, for they are not used to any sort of encounter, save one that's terror-stricken and submissive in the opponent.

'Tis a bit of a mêlée quite in the dark; slashing and pounding betwixt the branches: now a man unhorsed, anon up again; shots resounding, powder flashing, until in about ten minutes or less the chief makes a plunge for Sir Percy, crying out,

"So 'twas you said 'fight,' was't! Have a care; no man can defy Tom Kidde and live to tell it!"

"Nay!" shouts Her Ladyship, with spurs all

inches into the gray's sides, making him rear as she puts herself between Percy and the highwayman, "'twas I said 'fight'!"

Whizz! and a ball intended for Sir Percy strikes the gray dead under her.

Whizz! and her ball strikes Tom Kidde from his mount.

In less time than it takes to tell it, Peg was straight in the highwayman's saddle; he was picked up by two of his men, bleeding, set before one of 'em, and off: My Lords and Gentlemen find themselves once more alone in the midst of Epstowe Forest, a-crawling about on their hands and knees a-gathering up their spilled guineas and trinkets by flash of tinder-box.

Sir Percy, trying to explain to them who had been the means of their recovering their valuables and of putting the desperadoes to flight, cries out:

"I tell you! we owe't all to Sir Robin here! 'Slife, Gentlemen, I'd not have ventured to think of resistance had it not been for him. 'Twas he said, close in my ear, 'fight,' and by Gad! Sirs, he's lost more'n any of us; the horse shot under him."

"The gray's well lost teaching Tom Kidde he can't terrify all the men in England," answers the Beau from his sprawling search after his diamond snuff-box.

"Ho, Sir Robin! Sir Robin! Sir Robin!" Sir Wyatt shouts it out, and the rest of the company take it up with a long, mellow cadence that echoes for a mile.

"Answer man, for, by the faith, if we can't pledge you here in anything but a lap of May-dew out of a primrose leaf, we'll drink you such a bumper, an we reach the White Horse, as never was filled before! London'll toast you at every dinner-table in Mayfair. Odzooks, Sir, were you the fashion yesterday, what will you be to-morrow!" This from Escombe.

"Where is Sir Robin?" asks Percy. "He was beside me not five seconds since, but now, by my tinder, nor yet by the coming dawn, can I descry him," shading his eyes with his hand and peering about, for of a truth 'tis close to four o'clock, and, notwithstanding the heavy clouds, the east begins to thrill with the touch of day.

"Robin! Sir Robin! Ho, now! Think not to

breathes, and which never fails to spurt to the front when it gets exactly the right chance.

Peggy's light, nay, by this, weak hand, now gave the big black its chance, and with a snort, a toss of its head, and a vicious swell of its sides, it laid back its ears, took the bit between its teeth as if it had been a mess of oats, and reared a length on its forelegs: when, finding its rider still on, it started on a run which Her Ladyship had not the slightest power to check. All she could do was to keep her seat.

Like a flash, out of the forest on to the width of the heath, plume waving, sword flapping, laces rippling, curls flying; the mare's mane slapping in her face; legs and arms and will all at work to stop the beast or bring it into some sort of subjection. To no purpose. The black head now low, as if picking up a scent from the turf it tore; now up, as though snuffing its goal from afar, the mare skirted the heath, gained the meadows; over hedges where the birds rose in flocks behind its heels; ditches, where the muddy waters splashed over Her Ladyship's satin clothes: here a bolt into

an orchard, leaving a ribbon a-hanging on a limb; over the wall like a rocket, and, at breakneck gait, through a hamlet, rousing the people out of their beds to peep at pane, and wonder. Slap-dash into a pasture, scattering ewes and lambs like wool before the wind, taking a five-bar into a common, thence to highway; scampering a footbridge to leave it shivered behind them, and all Peg's thought just a brave prayer to be kept alive, so that she might not fail of foiling Sir Robin's men Sunday night!

Where she was going, she knew not. Where she was, she had no smallest idea when, as the sun looked over the long low line of horizon before her, she with a shudder beheld a gibbet outlined against the morning sky. The black gave a lunge that knocked her feet out of the stirrups (quick in again), reared, whinnied like a devil, and, nose to ground, now made her rider understand that up to the present she had done nothing much in the way of speed, or of efforts at emptying the saddle.

Yet Her Ladyship stuck on, with flying colors, too, and no loss of either wig, hat, weapon or will, and with grateful heart she now found herself

being spun across a magnificent park, where the deer fled before her, it is true, but at the upper end of which she saw looming the turrets and towers of a fine castle.

XI

Wherein Lady Peggy is condemned to be hanged, and sets forth, attended by the clergy, for the gallows.

Although Sir Percy had cheerfully foretold for Kennaston the roseate picture of Lady Diana's "Yes" crowning the young poet's somewhat diffident suit with untold happiness, the fact was quite other. Her Ladyship, on the day of Mr. Brummell's party to Ivy Dene, having overheard the Honorable Dolly Tarleton, in the library, laying six to four to Lady Biddy O'Toole, that their host's daughter was "only waiting for the beautiful young poet's asking, to jump into his arms immediately," did, with such sudden change of

demeanor from sweets to sours, languishing eyes to averted looks, smiles to pouts, corner chats to open flouts, put her lover into a state of mind, the like of which he presently described, as only he could, in a copy of verses, which the next night at White's were pronounced to be, indeed, "the masterpiece of one whose heart pants, whose whole being's but at the beck and call of her who wears a smocked petticoat, ogles with a witching eye, and should be vain that so much genius lays itself at her feet, to wit, Lady D——a W——n."

For, taking immediate fright at his Lady's coldness, Kennaston had ordered a post-chaise from the Brookwood Arms, and without a word of farewell to Lady Diana, save that embodied in an ode, "To Chloe When Unkind," which her woman found pinned to Her Ladyship's cloak when she was putting it on her shoulders the following morning, had gone to town, and just in time at the White Horse to be haled into Mr. Brummell's party for breakfast, and to learn of the adventure with Tom Kidde, the valor of Sir Robin McTart, and the absence of that young gentleman, as also Sir Percy, from the board.

When Lady Diana's woman hooked her mistress's cloak about her 'twas at five o'clock in the morning, and of the party at the Castle every lady's woman was performing the same office, adding hood over curls and puffs, and sticking the finest of cambric pocket-napkins into their mistress' hands by the half dozens; for 'twas easily seen that such early rising could be for no other cause than to go forth to bathe their Ladyships' faces in the May-dew; the which, when gathered from little copses and shadowy nooks before the sun had yet shone upon't, was warranted to enhance that beauty which was already evident, and to create those charms which, alas! are occasionally lacking.

Lady Diana spelled out her lover's verses as best she could, tripping from door to door, and calling her young companions from their mirrors; sending a footman and a page to summon the gallants who were to accompany them in their expedition, and laughing heartily as she made out more from a footman than from Kennaston's muse that he had betaken himself to town rather than longer incur her displeasure and her frowns.

"Bless me, but my suitor's in a fine pickle!

Lud! though, I'm not disposed to have these hussies a-laying six to four on my bein' ready to jump at his offer; still, I'd rather he'd stopped over, or else that some one most amusin' were here; for instance Sir Robin McTart, which is not to be!"

Then a-rapping at the doors, and laughter from girlish lips; pattering of heels down the hall and stair-case; out to meet the gentlemen, bowing and complimenting on the terrace; over the lawns, and through the flower-gardens, and past the offices and stables, where Lord Brookwood, even thus early, was sunning himself in the yard, and talking over county matters with Mr. Biggs, J. P.

"Where to? Where to?" sings out His Lordship cheerily with hat in hand, and Mr. Biggs down to the ground before so much beauty, fashion and rank.

"Off to the copse, father," calls back Diana, "to gather the May-dew and wash our faces; when we come back you must tell us all how much more beautiful we are to-day than we were yesterday!"

With which lively sally Lady Diana and the rest

of 'em are crossing the hill and laughing as they pass out of sight on their two miles' away walk to Armsleigh Copse.

Lord Brookwood is about to resume his conversation with Biggs, while the half-dozen grinning stable boys, behind His Lordship's back, are rubbing their fists in the wet turf of a paddock, and smearing their red faces with the dew, the head-groom touching them up with a lash; when a whinny, that sets every animal in the stalls and out of 'em a-replying, sets all the cocks crowing, hens cackling, chicks peeping, dogs barking, geese squawking, smites their startled ears, and yonder, hilly-o-ho! Sirs; in a cloud of upturned soil, in a shower of splash from the river, with a thud on the wooden bridge, a bound over the stone wall of the kitchen garden; comes a black with nigh every tooth in its mouth bared, foaming, smoking, bloody; rider bent double to saddle's bow, clinging with legs and arms.

"Homing Nell and the highwayman! Tom Kidde! Tom Kidde!"

"Homing Nell!" the shout goes up from every

throat there, from His Lordship to the 'ostlers and boys.

"Tom Kidde! Tom Kidde!"

"By Gad! Sir," cries the Earl. "I knew Nell'd come back sooner or later! Surround him. Bag him!"

Peggy hears the shouts as the ungovernable steed lunges, lurches, rears beneath her spurs and still tightly gripped reins; she takes in the situation, but not to its full import, until she now hears the voice of Biggs uplifted.

"Lord Brookwood! Lord Brookwood! mind her heels, My Lord, mind her heels! Leave the takin' of the damned cut-purse to me and the boys!"

At the word "Brookwood," Her Ladyship realizes that she is on the domains of Lady Diana's father! and being mistaken for a Knight of the Road!

The latter she felt she could easily abide, and as easily refute; but the former was more than even her spent spirit could stand. So, as Biggs, His Lordship, the grooms, the stable-boys and 'ostlers and helpers all formed into a ring with whips, canes, stones and halloos to take her prisoner, she

plucked up courage from the depths, and, raising herself in her saddle and her head in the air, with one superhuman tug at the bridle and prick with the steels, she made to get off! and away! But Her Ladyship's nerve was not the equal of Homing Nell's, nor yet to be pitted with success against the waving arms and jumping legs of a dozen stout men. With the final crack of the head-groom's lash about her heels, with the pop in the air above her hat of Mr. Biggs's blunderbuss, caught from the hand of one of the lads, "Homing Nell" was brought to a quivering stand-still, and My Lady Peggy to bay in the stable-yard of Brookwood Castle!

"Ha!" cries the Earl, "my pretty fellow, you're trapped at last! The night you stole the black mare from me I shouted after you, as well as the gag at my mouth would permit, that she'd bring you no luck, and that muscles of iron wouldn't hold her the day she made up her mind to get home."

Peggy, glad of the use of her lungs once more, and now nigh bursting with laughter at being so glibly mistook for one of the most reckless fellows

in all England, took off her hat, bowed low, and said:

"My Lord Brookwood, 'tis, I believe, I have the honor of addressing?"

"Ho! ho! ho!" Mr. Biggs, from a survey of the saddle-bow now bursts out in triumphant joyfulness.

"'Od's blood, My Lord! but here's luck, here's justice, here's what comes of my bein' here when I am!" and Mr. Biggs now holds aloft upon the point of his stick the black mask of Master Tom Kidde, which the rogue had dropped when he was hit, and which had caught and hung by its riband from that moment to this, unseen by Lady Peg.

"Highwayman! highwayman! highwayman!" yells every lung in the place, while the whole dozen, including His Lordship and the Justice, threaten Lady Peggy with their cudgels, lashes and stones.

"I pray ye, My Lord, Gentlemen, and good fellows!" cries she, remembering now the entire history of the animal she bestrides, as rehearsed some six hours earlier by Beau Brummell and Mr. Vane. "I am no highwayman."

A groan of derision greets this announcement.

"Nay, but the rather am I the victim of Tom Kidde, than he himself! Together with a party of my friends, being at mid-night last, on the return from a visit to Mr. Brummell's seat, Ivy Dene, we were set upon by the rogues in the midst of Epstowe Forest; I had the luck, both good and bad, to put a ball into Tom, to get my horse shot under me, and to mount the scoundrel's steed, the which has brought me to Your Lordship's door, and the mare, herself, to where she belongs, it seems!"

"A damned fine story, 'fore George!" exclaims Biggs, laughing triumphantly, now holding up two watches, three rings, a diamond snuff-box, a seal, two magnificent pins, and a most splendid jeweled stomacher, high above his head in the tip of the sunshine.

"'Sdeath!" cried Lord Brookwood, seizing one of the trinkets and examining it with his spy-glass. "What's this? 'Percy de Bohun, Christmas from his aff. mother,'" reads His Lordship. Then another, "'Wyatt Lovell souvenir of Italy!' Gad, Biggs," looking Her Ladyship over, where she still sits atop of the steaming black, "we've got the

cursed blackguard this time! What else in his saddle pockets? aught?"

These Biggs, assisted by the head-groom, is energetically emptying of a miscellaneous collection of valuables, while Lady Peggy looks on in amazement as yet only flavored with amusement, and one more vain regret for her abandoned petticoats.

"Yes, My Lord, these thousands of pounds' worth," replied the Justice, holding aloft his treasure trove; "and it'll be a short shrift for the devil, I can say that."

"Hark ye," now says Her Ladyship, as she recalls with a not unnatural tremor the death-warrant she had heard was lying to hand in Mr. Biggs's pocket. "Lord Brookwood, I am no highwayman; my story is true; I am"—the words stuck in Peggy's throat; she coughed, the stable boys tittered; then the head-groom tilted the saddle and spilled her out of it to the ground; at a word from Biggs, a couple of the men tied her, hand and foot, with a stout rope, and a pair of farming reins about her middle.

"Now who do you call yourself, my fine fellow?" says His Lordship.

"Sir Robin McTart of Robinswold, Kent!" cries Peggy, glad to be able to answer without the lie direct. "And I demand instant freedom and immunity," cries she, tortured and quivering beneath the rude hands and ruder gibes of the grooms and 'ostlers.

"Demand away! my pretty buck-skin, with your jeweled hilt!" returns Biggs, stripping the weapon from her thigh. "Your satin breeches and gold-laced waistcoat! 'Tain't no use denyin' you your speech, and your will to palaver on whatever matter you will, for before the clock strikes eight, you'll be home with your father in hell."

"Tut, tut, Mr. Biggs," says His Lordship. "Call Mr. Frewen, the Curate, he's at his studies in the library, we havin' sat late over our cards last night; and let him have his prayer-book to hand, open at the page for malefactors after condemnation."

"Go, you, Michael," this to one of the now awe-struck lads hanging, staring at Peg over the paddock paling. "Ask Mr. Frewen to come quickly."

"But this is monstrous, Sir!" cries Her Ladyship, now thoroughly alarmed, and near to losing her wits betwixt her endeavors to keep up her man's

estate, her contempt of her own frowardness, her shame at being thus at the mercy of her rival's parent, and her actual terror of her position.

"I do beseech you, I am an honest person, my tale is true. Is it not but the justice due to any subject of His Majesty's, however humble, that he should not be condemned before he is tried, or even his identity proven?"

"I'll be sworn, My Lord," exclaims Biggs, "'tis a voice and air to wheedle fine ladies out of their stomachers and chains, but not to tempt the law. Sirrah!" he continues, addressing himself to Her Ladyship, who is by this firmly tied to a post like a colt about to be broken to harness. "'Tain't no use for you to be imaginin' as justice and His Majesty ain't a-doing their best for you. Here have you been a terror to all God-fearing, law-abiding Englishmen any time these half-dozen of years. A-poundin' every heath in England, Hornslow, Bagshott, and all the commons, Wimbledon, Wandsworth, Finchley; a-hulking in Epstowe with your mates, and making the lives of travelers a burden most horrible; ain't you secreted uncountable pounds' worth of plunder in your devilish

caves and dens? Haven't you left the earth strewed with corpses in your ugly path? Answer me, Sir!" and Mr. Biggs stamps his foot on the ground.

"No, Sir!" shouts Peg, "I ain't and haven't, and I'm not! 'Slife, My Lord Brookwood," cries she in a terrible way, twisting her tied hands together. "For God's sake, send up to town post-haste, and find out Mr. Brummell, Mr. Vane, Mr. Chalmers, Lord Escombe, Sir Lovell Wyatt!"

But His Lordship has turned up the path toward the Castle and met Mr. Frewen, to whom he is explaining the necessities of the situation.

'Tis such a fair May day, with bud and blossom, bough and bird; fowls, men, beasts, all free of tether, and My Lady is like to weep; cry out her sex, her very name and estate, as she feels the gall upon her wrists and ankles, and knows what fate awaits her.

She even, for one weak moment, thinks she will implore Lord Brookwood to send up to London for her rival, his own daughter, Lady Diana, and let her come down and tell him who is Sir Robin

McTart—for Lady Peggy believes Lady Di to be in town and has no knowledge to the contrary.

Yet, there in the stable-yard, with imprisonment as she supposes, and even death dangling for her at no great loss of time, with her liberty gone; her word no better than a thief's; with no earthly hand upraised to sustain her, My Lady Peggy's stout heart does not flutter to dismay. For that one brief instant 'tis, without doubt, in her mind to confess and fling herself upon the mercy of the Earl and the Curate, who now draw nigh; but when she reflects upon the monstrous tissue of her deceits, and the unutterable shame of the exposure of the cause of them, 'tis then she is like to whimper, but for naught else.

Mr. Frewen approaches; 'tis a young man of a pale cadaverous countenance, whose first bow to a highwayman is indeed, though he find him in durance vile, a timid one.

The supposed Tom Kidde gives the man of the cloth eye for eye, so that this one quails and stumbles in his speech; and finally, leaving in the rear all his preconceived plans for a hasty reforma-

tion, he promptly remarks, opening his prayer-book to the riband:

"You know your doom, Mr. Kidde; shall I pray for you here?"

"Faith!" says Lady Peggy, plucking up heart, once her resolution is taken not to reveal her secret, come what may. "I do not know my doom, Sir! It seems sufficient 'doom' for an honest English gentleman, who has met with a mishap, to be brought to a nobleman's threshold and get foul treatment rather than welcome. Pray for me, Sir, an you will, there's none so much deserves or needs it. Pray on!"

"Frewen!" beckons His Lordship, as he watches the 'ostlers rubbing down the restored Homing Nell, and confers with Mr. Biggs as to the plunder and the meting out of justice. "Frewen, gain the wretch's confidence an you can, the whereabouts of all the gold and jewels he has stolen; my watch. And also, if he have wife or child, it might not be amiss, eh, Biggs? to inquire if he have any message for them?"

"Aye, My Lord" puts in the pompous Biggs,

up-looking from his perusal of a long, sealed, important-appearing parchment, unrolled before his eyes. "By ascertaining their whereabouts, we should perhaps get the clue to all the bloody rascal's pelf."

A combination of Christian charity and official shrewdness, which commended itself highly to His Lordship, as he sent the Curate back to the comforting of the malefactor across the yard.

"Hark ye, Mr. Kidde," says Mr. Frewen, lowering his voice, and, for the credit of his soul, with gentleness at his heartstrings.

"I'm not Mr. Kidde, I tell you, I swear't!" says Her Ladyship firmly.

"Well, well," says the man of the Church, "mayhap that's an assumed name; but surely, now, Sir, with not two hours of life left you, to me, me alone, Sir, it were wiser drop all disguises. Surely now you are not Sir Robin McTart?" in a soothing and sorrowful tone.

Peggy winces.

"Go seek and ask all the noblemen and gentlemen I've named, Sir, they'll quickly set me to

rights in your eyes, I pledge you. Oh, Sir, for the love of God!" cries she, whispering very low. "I speak the truth! I am no highwayman."

"I am used to quibbles, Mr. Kidde; I know that now you are no robber, but merely a prisoner under sentence of death."

"What!" cries she. "'Tis not possible that a man is taken, tried, disallowed to prove himself, and put out of the world, betwixt sunrise and breakfast, in the reign of His Majesty George the Third!"

"'Tis so," answers the Curate, pulling the rope and leathers, and pushing Her Ladyship around a bit toward the east, as he points what he considers a salutary finger. "Yonder's the gibbet, Mr. Kidde, and from it you must hang by eight. I implore of you now—"

Lady Peggy's eyes are fastened upon the arms and cross-beams of the gallows, which are outlined clearly against the deep blue sky, and full in the shine of the spring sun.

"Well," says she to herself, all in a flash, as thoughts can travel three abreast ofttimes, and twelve times quicker than the scrivener can set

'em down—"I've been a very accursedly wicked girl; but, thank God! my pride ain't all gone yet. I'll hang! but I'll never give up my secret! When I'm gone, if they find it out—I won't be here to be a-hearin' of the taunts and jeers and sympathies; and of my mother's and father's sorrows!" At this point Peggy is very near to tears, when the Curate says, interrupting their possible flow:

"Now, Mr. Kidde, if you have any message for —your wife—perhaps?" he ejaculates hesitatingly, and with good knowledge that the marriage ceremony was one usually omitted from the code of gentlemen of the road.

"I have no wife!" cries Her Ladyship, in a heat betwixt her remorse for her parents and the unconscious ridiculousness of Mr. Frewen's question.

"Or it might be," suggests this one with a sigh, "you have a little child, Mr. Kidde—?"

"No, Sir," says My Lady very low and quick. "That I haven't."

"A dear friend and comrade?" pursues the Curate.

"Yes, I have," answers she, for during all this

hour just past, a thousand thoughts have come to Peggy about Sir Percy.

"Ah," responds Frewen joyously. "Now tell me where he's to be found, and entrust me with the message, and be assured all will be carried out to your wishes."

"Thank you," says Peggy. "Free my right hand if you will; give me something to write with, and the leaf out of your prayer-book, and I'll ask you the favor."

The Curate, under the strict superintendence of Biggs, who has all this while been dispatching boys on horses, hither and yon, to notify the quality and the country side both, that Tom Kidde's been taken and will hang at eight from the gibbet a-top of Armsleigh Hill, loosens Her Ladyship's arm of the thong, and gives her a leaf and a pencil with the top of the post for a support.

"To Sir Percy de Bohun, Charlotte Street, London," writes she. "plese An you lov God And The Kinge goe not evar Again toe walke onne The dove peere at The Bottomme of littel Boye yarde Their isse onne swares Toe Kille you & you doe This isse writ bye onne now noe more."

Her Ladyship folds the scrap of paper over and over; hands back the pencil to Mr. Frewen; and then she says:

"Sir, will you promise me on that Book you're holding in your hand, you'll not look at this or send it until I'm dead?"

"I will," answers the young man, more touched than he cares to admit, even to himself.

"And further," says she, "will you pledge me your word it shall reach him it's intended for before this time Sunday?"

"I will," is the reply, "unless it be in the depths of Epstowe and inaccessible to my horse or myself."

"'Tis in London, Sir, and quite accessible. 'Tis a warning for life and death, and I'll count you fail me not, nor him whose life you'd be the means of saving."

"I pledge my word, Mr. Kidde," replies the Curate, backing away to make room for Justice Biggs, and with the very laudable sensation in his mind that he is to be the instrument of preserving some unknown from the clutches of the doubtless repentant outlaw's own men.

In less than five minutes after, Biggs had marshaled his cavalcade and rode forth of the stable-yard of Brookwood Castle; his white cob at the head, a-holding in his left hand the duly signed warrant for the execution of one Thomas Kidde. Following him, strode the hastily summoned Master William Lambe, the butcher, who was to do duty as hangman (sooth to say, hangings were rare in this county, and there was no one appointed by law to the office, it being thus left to the discretion of the Justice).

The Earl, mounted, rode next with a dozen of his servants, and in the midst of these My Lady Peggy, astride of the black once more, but with face to tail, hands tied together, and no hat to her head; Mr. Frewen at her side walking; a motley crowd growing and gathering at every step, about her, of gaping, wondering, jubilant and curious persons of all ages, sexes, and conditions.

Never a whimper out of My Lord, the Earl of Exham's only daughter. A set rigid look about the drawn lips, and an unearthly pallor shining through all the dark stains Her Ladyship had been a-using of late.

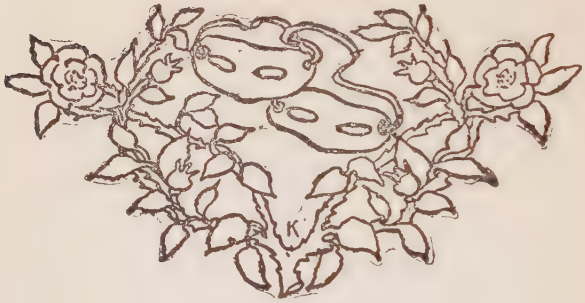
Not a word did she say, save to ask Mr. Frewen to read the Declaration of Absolution or Remission of Sins out of his prayer-book as they went; which he did under his breath, and much jolted by the rough highway, which now the procession had gained; and likewise laying much unction to his soul that, in so short a space of time, his comfortable ministrations had produced so seeming abundant godly results!

When he had finished Her Ladyship said, "Amen," and thereafter held up her head with that courage which is born of one of two things, conscious innocence or a profound repentance for sins, which, while to others they may appear puerile, to the offender are worthy of the wrath of the Creator and the condemnation of man.

She noted the hawthorn in the hedges, the dew upon the turf; the tall mawkin swaying in the wind in the middle of a newly sown field; and, as her lids raised, the mustering crowds, all with steps bent, and greedy eyes fixed, yonder to the hill-top where the gibbet stood, and where the new rope dangled for her neck.

Yet she made no sign.

Not even when she heard the rabble laying their groats and sixpences, that Kidde would, or wouldn't "die game."



XII

Rehearseth how, in the very nick o' time,
Her Ladyship's neck is saved from
the noose by Sir Percy.

As yet, in the depths of Armsleigh Copse, no news of the supposed highwayman's capture had penetrated, although the Earl, with commendable foresight in behalf of the entertainment of his young daughter and her companions, had sent a messenger to impart the sight shortly to be had; the messenger, having a sweetheart in the other direction, must needs go apprise her first! So the gay Ladies and their cavaliers sat on fallen logs, strolled hither and yon, knelt to sop their bits of linen in the dewy hollows, laughed, chatted, dabbed their faces, now lacking any coat of crimson, save

that which Nature might have vouchsafed, and made great show of a fine rural simplicity.

"La!" cried the Honorable Dolly. "Water hasn't touched my face before since know I not when!" pecking at her cheeks with the corner of her pocket-napkin. "But it has a monstrous refreshing sensation!"

"Oh, Doll, 'tis not thus and so you must apply it, as 'twere some French essence worth its weight in guineas; but look!" cried Lady Diana, flopping down and burying her face in a bath of the dew-drops, and laughing as she looks up dripping.

"That's the way, faith," coincides Lady Biddy, scrubbing her own round cheeks with her wrung out linen, then both fists into her blue eyes to dry off the winkers.

"'Slife, Ladies!" exclaims one of the gentlemen, "but you almost tempt us to follow your example."

"Hither, ye gossoon," answers Lady Biddy, "an' I'll be afther makin' your countenance shine. Hark! Hoofs!"

"Hoofs! Hoofs!" cry all these fair ones, a-darting this way and that, stuffing their napkins into their bodices, as a courteous voice, with a—

"By your leave, Ladies and Sirs!" greets them, and none other than Sir Percy, self and horse spent in his fruitless search for the supposed Sir Robin, emerges from the bridle-path across the common, at the edge of the copse.

"The top of the morning to you, Sir Percy de Bohun," laughs Lady Biddy.

"Percy!" exclaims Lady Diana, "prithee, what are you doing out of doors at this hour?"

"Seeking May-dew! mayhap," suggests the Honorable Dolly.

"But nay, Your Ladyships," returns he. "I am seeking Sir Robin McTart."

And forthwith Sir Percy proceeds to give them a history of the adventures of the night, omitting no smallest detail of the prowess of Sir Robin. He has just concluded his recital amid a burst of tumultuous "Ohs! ahs! Luds!" and a vast deal of commiserating sympathy, and a monstrous collection of pretty oaths and curses for Tom Kidde, when into the center of this colloquy jumps Lord Brookwood's messenger, nudging his sweetheart behind a tree, to tell as best he can his errand. To bid all the company at once to see the sight, it now

not lacking more than the quarter to the hour when Mr. Lambe will adjust the noose, and send one of the boldest and most courtly young outlaws of his day a-swinging to his deserts.

This information, it may be imagined, was received with acclaim of all, and by Sir Percy with positive joy; his only regret, as, dismounting and leading his jaded horse, he walked at Lady Diana's side, being that Sir Robin had so contrived to give them the slip, and not even to have the happiness of witnessing justice done the rogue who had so near deprived him of existence.

"Here's to drive off the vapors an any one had 'em!" cried the lively Lady Biddy, swinging her hat by its ribands. "And sure'n it's not believed I'll be, when I get home to County Cork and tell 'em I saw a highwayman strung up!"

"Faith, Di," says Sir Percy, "'twas a lucky chance for the whole country when the rascal made off with your father's famous black!"

"That was it!" answered she. "The time always comes when no man's muscle on earth can hold Homing Nell; and 'twas a fine fortune, by my life! when Tom Kidde essayed to ride her. 'Twas

a wonder he didn't jump and run for his life, though," adds she thoughtfully.

"Zounds! there's a sort of devil-may-care humor in the composition of those fellows that keeps 'em sticking in any saddle they leap into, until the beast's bestridden that can throw them out of it. They're so used to taking chances, I doubt if they ever dream of danger until it's too late!"

"When'll we see the gibbet?" asks the Honorable Dolly, panting with her quick pace.

"Soon," answers Lady Di.

"Ochone, an' I hope we'll not be afther bein' too late to see it all!" chimes in Lady Biddy short-breathed too.

"Percy," says Diana, "up in your saddle and spy, for I'd not have us miss so fine a sight for a hundred pounds!"

"No sooner said than done!" answers Sir Percy de Bohun, from atop of his horse, where he shades his eyes with his hand and gazes off to the hill where the gibbet stands.

"Good God!" cries he, clapping spurs that send spurts of blood into the eyes of one of the gentlemen, and a shower of sand all over the whole

party, and away with him! Tearing up the turf as he goes; into the midst of the strings of gaping, jostling, hurrying folk; scattering 'em right and left, leaving 'em in his wake dumfounded, picking each other up. Through the high street of Brook-Armsleigh Village, clatter! dash! plunge! with prick and urge, and goad of thigh and lash! and straining, starting eyes fixed on the face he sees outlined against the fair blue morning sky; the brave undaunted face, dark, under its yellow hair, bearing the strange likeness to His Lady—His Lady! nay, this is His Lady's lord and love, for whom he rides,—and with noose about his neck now, and man-of-cloth and man-of-blood both at hand; this one with book, that one with cap, the sea of open faces seething breathless all around.

"On! on!" whispers Percy bending to the bow, and whispering hoarsely to the long roan, his very soul in tremor, his lips parched, his forehead and lip dripping sweat.

Into the midst of 'em; nearly throwing Lord Brookwood from his seat; off his beast like a thunderbolt, and with a long leap up on the

boards beside Lambe, the butcher, and Biggs, the Justice, and Frewen, the Curate.

"By God! Sirs," cries he, "what's this ye're doing? This gentleman's Sir Robin McTart of Robinswold, Kent!" tearing the hemp from Her Ladyship's throat, from her wrists; pushing away the three of 'em, and half lifting the supposed Baronet in his lusty arms, he drags, carries, swings Peg down to the ground, and up into his own saddle.

And then the explanations! the astonishments; the monstrous wonder of it. The humility, the subjection, the apologies; the supplications of all these Lords, Gentlemen, Ladies, worthies, worships, vagabonds and multitudes.

Woman-like, as she sits there for a few moments, dazed, so sudden fetched from death to life, she has but the thought that 'tis to him she loves she owes deliverance.

But none of their hospitality or amends will she have, or even listen to; no tarrying at Brookwood Castle; no smallest glance back for all the wheedles and coaxes of Lady Diana, Lady Biddy, the Hon-

orable Dolly and the rest. All she asks, and gets, is her scrawl from Mr. Frewen.

Courtly acceptance of Lord Brookwood's abject attempts at amends; gracious bows, hands, words, laughter at last; and My Lady in a hastily procured post-chaise bids the gibbet at Brook-Armsleigh Village farewell, and starts for London, where she swears she's due and must not fail of being, for to-morrow, Sunday.

Sir Percy, too, affirms, he must up to town without delay, to have the honor and pleasure of himself rehearsing at Will's the splendid courage of Sir Robin, and his almost miraculous escape from a horrible and ignominious death.

In truth Percy longed, after the excitements of the past four-and-twenty hours, to be alone; to seek, as was his wont of late, in some unfrequented, obscure part of the town, such as the desolate neighborhood of the Dove Pier, an opportunity to ponder upon Lady Peggy; to guess fruitlessly of her whereabouts; to curse himself, and Sir Robin who had, with a good cause, he generously allowed, so known how to win her from him; to marvel how, at ev'ry turn, this same Baronet appeared to

become entangled in his own matters; to question if Peggy were indeed now the lawful wedded wife of this gentleman from Kent. In brief, to pester Fate with queries and surmises far too numerous and intricate to set down.

Thus upon reflection, he purposely absented himself, after his first visit to Will's on reaching London, from either of the chocolate or coffee-houses, which he was accustomed to patronize, knowing full well that the most pressing and absorbing things he should hear would all have Sir Robin McTart for text. He did not even repair to Mr. Brummell's house to give an account of the rescue of the Beau's protégé from the hangman, feeling unwilling to recount his own part in the affair and but too certain that long since the whole matter would have traveled to Peter's Court and into every other precinct of the town. Having, also, learned from Lady Diana that Kennaston had quitted Brookwood Castle in a dense of a melancholy humor, he did not either go to Lark Lane, (not finding Peg's twin at the house in Charlotte Street), but moped the Sunday through, thankful that his uncle was gone down into the country;

listening to the church-bells; thumbing a prayer-book Lady Peggy had given him one Easter-day, now five years since; finally flinging it from him; pacing up and down the hall; side-curls awry, waistcoat unbuttoned; ruffles tumbled; breeches wrinkled; mind distract, and altogether as valiant a young gentleman as ever made a wager or a toast, unsheathed a blade, or mounted a horse, rendered all of a-muddle by not knowing which way to turn to find the whereabouts and wherefores of a certain fair lady; which has been a state of affairs not uncommon to young gentlemen before this one's day, and like to occur until the species is extinct.

Yet, 'tis quite true, too, that Sir Percy's case was a bit out of the usual, inasmuch as the mystery of Lady Peggy's present abiding place remained as deep to-day as 'twas a fortnight ago.

"Well, Grigson," asked his master, as his man appeared unsummoned, "what is it?"

"Asking Your Honor's pardon," replies this one, "but I made bold during Your Honor's absence from town to go down to Kennaston Castle."

"Well, well?" cries Sir Percy excitedly, "what news?"

"With submission, Sir," replies the man, sadly. "None."

"'Od's blood! you fool!" exclaimed the master. "Why do you seek me with your 'none'! Is Her Ladyship still from home?"

Grigson bows.

"And her mother still in York?"

Grigson bows.

"And the Earl still believing his daughter to be in that damned Kent with her godmother?"

Grigson bows for the third time.

"And that cursed Abigail still affirming that her mistress is up in London?"

Grigson bows for the fourth time.

"Asking your pardon, Sir Percy," he adds, noting with a keen and generous sympathy, which not infrequently exists in the hearts of serving-men for their masters, the deepening pallor of the young gentleman's countenance, and his most dishevelled appearance.

"Asking your pardon, Sir, but whiles I might be doing your wig, which is most uncommon

tousled, I'd make bold to tell you, Sir, that Mistress Jane Chockey, Lady Peggy's own woman, Sir, is in an awful way, Sir!"

"My wig may go to the devil, you idiot!" cries Percy. "What's the blabbing jade's tantrums to me! Get out of my sight."

"With submission, Sir Percy, but Chockey does nothing at all but cry out her eyes from morning till night, and went on her knees a-beseechin' me to find Her Ladyship, which all I could coax out of her by my best endeavors at wheedlin' the seck, Sir, was that she last saw Her Ladyship standin'—"

"Where! where?" gasps Sir Percy, seizing Mr. Grigson by the arm with a grip of steel.

"Before the door of Lord Kennaston's lodgin's, Sir, in Lark Lane—a—"

"Yes? yes? go on!" with glaring, gazing eyes fixed on his man's ruddy visage.

"A-talkin', Sir, to some one a-sittin' inside of a most elegant chair!"

"Did she see the man's face?" he asks tensely.

"No, Sir Percy; but Her Ladyship bade Chockey go home and not tarry for her, and make such ex-

cuse to His Lordship as you have learned before. And, asking your pardon humbly, Sir, Mistress Chockey is of the opinion that her young Lady got into that chair and was carried off, a willin' victim, Sir, to the h'altar, and married to the contents of the chair, Sir, afore that wery noon."

"Damn Chockey and her opinions!" mutters Sir Percy, under his breath, picking up his hat from the table and rushing into the street, nigh to choking with his emotions and his despair.

He turned the corner, almost knocking over a couple of link-boys in his path, tossed them some pennies for their tumble, and into Piccadilly.

"Fare, Sir? fare, Your Honor? fare, Your Lordship?" cry a half-dozen of 'em, and he jumps into a hackney chaise purposeless.

"Where to, My Lord?" asks the man.

"To the devil!" replies the passenger, "or anywhere else, only drive fast and let me down within walk of the river."

XIII

In the hereinunder Her Ladyship doth shoot two varlets at one fire; and appointeth a meeting with Sir Robin at Vauxhall.

The man, who is shrewd, and has, in his time, fetched and carried many gentlemen of the first quality hither and yon, takes this one's measure and sets off at a tearing pace down to the city, past the Tower, across the Bridge, into Southwark, back over Southwark, up to Westminster; to Pimlico,—past the very Puffled Hen where, at this very moment, Sir Robin McTart, himself, and not his *soi-disant,* sits huddled in his upper room over a fire, cheering his small soul with dreams of murder and love. On to Chelsea, and a whirligig 'round

again to that region which froths foully over to the Thames bank in Little Boy Yard, and the jutting, rotting, creaking old Dove Pier.

"This be's a young nobleman," soliloquized the cabman, "wot's in love, or else is a-meditatin' on a-takin' 'is own life, or a-runnin' away from the Jews, or from his gamin' debts, or I'm not James Finney. An' this here's the spot for him to be dropped at; the river most 'andy, also deep, and h'if he's bound to make an end of hisself, no man wot owns a hoss is as worthy of the reward wot'll be published for the recovery of His Lordship's corp, as me." With which pious reflection the chaise is brought to a sharp standstill, causing Percy to start from his melancholy and look out of the pane.

"Where are we?" asks he, not at first, such is the depth of his suffering, recognizing a spot with which, as Sir Robin had been at pains and expense to have discovered for him, he was indeed of late most familiar.

"This be Dove Pier, My Lord," answered Mr. James Finney, now descending from his box and standing respectfully at the kennel.

"Ha! Yes, to be sure. I'll get out."

He does so and pays the fare with such a largess as makes Mr. Finney, through his tanned hide, almost blush to take it.

"Wot's the odds, though?" remarks he to himself, "three sovereigns is better off in my pocket than actin' as sinkers to a nobleman's body." To Sir Percy he says:

"I thought Your Lordship'd fancy this bit of the river; it's lonesome and wery pleasant and wery deep. Good-night to Your Lordship, and good luck."

"Good luck!" echoes Sir Percy, under his breath, as he strides down the length of the rotten pier, his gaze now fixed on the black and swiftly ebbing tide, now raised to meet a sky no whit the brighter than the sobbing waters beneath it. No stars, nor moon; only a sickly thin gleam shot out of the lamp that swings far up Little Boy Yard over the door of the tavern.

Dark, sad, despairing, the whole of it, with but the lap, lap of the Thames's life beating against the old piles, as it swirls and swings on its hurrying way to fall once again into the sea.

Percy de Bohun is no cowardly sort, even to think of ending his woes in a watery grave; he is merely a brave, sore-stricken young man, whose whole faith and heart have been pinned to one who has forsaken him forever (as he thinks); and, with the instincts of his kind, he is glad to be here, away from mankind or woman either, to get his grip once more on himself, to fight out for the last time, he swears, the wild, jealous covetousness which is tugging at his heartstrings, to quell the tumult in his soul, and then to get back home to his uncle's house like a Christian; and, God helping him! to lead a decent life and a brave life, for King and country in the great new world across the seas.

All this and more traverses his brain, the "more" being mostly tantalizing visions of Lady Peggy in all the gamut of her humors, slipping in and out of every resolution he makes, every fond farewell he swears he'll take of her most dear, most faithless memory forever!

His eyes are bent upon the ground. He neither sees nor hears, nor would heed if he did, aught about him.

In truth there is not anything to hear, save the river on its journey.

But there is something to see.

Sir Robin's two desperadoes, a-lurking yonder up in the close shadow of the timbered tenements, which line the precinct on the side where the oil-lamps shine.

Across the narrow street, where the huddling houses, with their broken chimneys, rag-stuffed windows, flapping strings of bird-cages, old clothes, and forlorn archways, are deeper in gloom even than their opposites, there's ambushed another.

One who, arrived in town the night before, and set down at Mr. Brummell's in Peter's Court, made a change of garments and off again, since the master of the house was out, to a quiet inn in High Holborn; spent there a few hours; then out of doors and wandered as far as the Temple Church; back again to the inn, and, with rising excitement, and an almost frantic and curious impatience, awaited the fall of night; then a hackney coach to Westminster, alighting at Horseferry Road; dismissing the vehicle; thence afoot to the pier; hiring a boat; a pull alone down the river

to Dove Pier; tying the skiff to a rusty hook; a quick run bent to ground; up, and across the yard to her present place of concealment.

'Twas indeed Lady Peggy, her heart in her mouth, her breath coming fiercely betwixt her tight-shut lips, the drops standing on her forehead, each hand grasping a pistol ready cocked, and her dark eyes pinned to the two crouching objects not three yards away from her; anon, following the jerks of these worthies' thumbs as they indicate the tall figure with bent head still pacing the pier back and forth, she knows her lover and his doom are nearing each the other.

Will high Heaven help her?

Her Ladyship can not hear them, if indeed they speak at all, which is unlikely; the language of such gentry at such crises consisting usually of signs. Luckily for her, the glint from the Three Cups, meager though it be, falls athwart the cutthroats, who now move stealthily down the yard toward the pier, timing their pace so that they shall reach t'other side of the rickety float when their victim shall attain the hither. It falls out as they have designed, and now, not ten paces sep-

arate Sir Percy de Bohun from his end, when Peggy darts light-footed, having cast aside her shoes, down her side the kennel to the pier, bringing her exactly behind the murderers.

With the slow, precise tread of beings accustomed to such enterprises, not too hurried at the performance of a not unsavory task, they slip over into Sir Percy's very wake, Peggy at their backs, noting now, with her pretty nose within twelve inches of their cat-like heels, the gleam of a dagger in the hand of each.

Before she had thought, the two scoundrels seized Percy from the rear, the one clapping his hairy hand over the game's mouth for a gag, the other grasping the young man's two hands which had been hanging idly clasped at his back. Not a word, a whisper, even a gasp—

But two shots! sounding like one, and striking Sir Robin McTart's hirelings in their flanks, laying them on the ground, free Sir Percy de Bohun, stunned, bewildered, to yet catch merely a glimpse of a figure running to pier's end, jumping into a boat; then the flash of quick oars fading into the silence and the blackness of the Thames.

With drawn sword he gave himself a rap on the chest and believed he had been dreaming.

But no, for at his feet lay two prostrate forms, each bleeding a bit, and feigning, as such apt rogues will, to be stone dead.

Percy knelt, struck a tinder and essayed to look at their faces; they were unknown to him, and perceiving now their estate, he formed the conclusion that a couple of footpads had nearly made an end of him, and walked away.

But of his rescue? the manner of it? the mysterious flight of his preserver? the boat ready at the pier's end? the twin shots just in the nick of time! What of all this?

Bah! Some bargeman with an honest heart a-passing by had seen the foul attempt, and paused to thwart it; some gentleman, maybe, on his way to rout or tryst, thinking to divert himself with a couple of pistols and so save a human life; some third desperado, envious of the chances of these two, making shift to rob them of their prey, since he was left out of their plot.

But no! None of these explanations bore the least resemblance to probabilities, in fact showed

not an atom of reason in their suggestion, and Percy was feign return to his uncle's house, thrice puzzled now, since he had not alone Lady Peggy's oblivion to unravel, but the miraculous saving of his own life to match it!

Her Ladyship, once safe in the boat, pulled hard to the upper pier, paid the boatman, and back by devious ways to Peter's Court and into her room; shut door and latched; down on her knees, wig thrown on the hearth, a-thanking God Percy was safe!

Tears? A shower of 'em, and trembling legs and arms, and heart beating to burst after the mad strain of the past eight-and-forty hours.

"Now," said Her Ladyship to herself, "now I can go back to Kennaston and spend the remainder of my life making cheeses for the Vicar to munch o' Sundays; brewing cider for daddy to accelerate the pace of his gout withal; breeding chicks as will win prizes, and pigs as will be the envy of all! and—" a sob occurred here—"presently a-reading in the London print of the grand marriage of Sir Percy de Bohun with Lady Diana Weston! And me without the chance of weddin' even that little

ape, Sir Robin McTart! But it's all right as 'tis," adds Her Ladyship. "Had I hung on Armsleigh Hill, 'twould not have been too bad for one reared as I have been in a God-fearing fashion, and who, for naught save jealousy, envy and all uncharitableness, did go and so unsex myself! Lud! Is't I? Peggy Burgoyne, spinster, a-sittin' here in breeches and waistcoat, a guest in Mr. Beau Brummell's house, without any other lady to keep me in countenance! 'Tis said one gets broke in to anything; but 'tis false! false! I'm not broke in to bein' a man, and I never should be! I detest, abhor, and can't endure the bein' one! I that had always figured to myself the happy day when I'd be taken up to town!"

Lady Peggy is now pacing the room, a trick, as has been set down earlier, that she'd borrowed from her twin.

"I'd thought to be of the ton, a most genteel young lady, monstrous fine, a lovely creature; a-taking a dish of tea at Ranelagh; a-ridin' to Court in dad's old coronet-coach and with all the feathers I could borrow on top of my frizzes and powder; and two sweet patches set just at the

corner of my dimples! That's what I'd dreamed of, with Percy a-staring at me, lost in admiration, and—love!" Her Ladyship stamps her foot. "But what 'tis, is this!" and she now picks up the wig from the hearth and flings it on the couch beside her coat and sword.

"'Taint no more in this world fine gentlemen sighin' and dyin' for me! no wedding favors and cake; no husband, no children; never! for there's no marryin' in heaven, an I ever get there! Nay, 'Peggy Burgoyne' 'll be writ on my tombstone, and like as not the lines followin' 'll be 'a maker of most uncommon fine sweetmeats and cheeses'!"

Another flood of tears, and then My Lady Peggy, obeying that well-balanced head of hers, brushes them away and proceeds to plan out her homeward journey, and to administer a cunning retouch of the cosmetics she had erstwhile bought of the players' apothecary in Drury Lane.

'Tis clear now, as it has been from the start, that she may not quit Mr. Brummell's house in other than man's attire, nor, so far as she can see, will it be possible for her to resume her own garments at any inn, or time, or place, before she reaches Ken-

naston, which she means to do ere night falls; and then the stableyard, where she knows Chockey will be milking, once gained, a cloak, the casting of Sir Robin's wig, and Her Ladyship feels certain she can enter her father's home unnoticed beneath the shelter of the faithful Chockey's argus eye.

But, though neatly laid, Her Ladyship's project was not quite yet to go into execution. Even as she was once more taking out the bundle from its hiding-place and tying up in it the long tail of her cut hair, she heard a hum of noises, voices below, inquiring if Sir Robin had as yet reached the house, and evidently obtaining an affirmative answer, for,—

"Where is the hero? Our hero! Our hero!"

"Where is our highwayman? Our highwayman!"

"Where is Tom Kidde, the gallant? The gallant of gallants!"

And a lot of such merry cries came echoing up the staircase and corridor toward her room.

Lady Peggy had utterly forgot the hanging.

The more recent matter of Percy and the assas-

sins had put her own adventure completely out of her head. For the first time she realized that she had not seen either Mr. Brummell or any of his company since she had unwillingly been borne away from them by Homing Nell in the midst of Epstowe Forest.

'Twas a halt she had not counted on; but, clapping on wig and coat, she flung wide the door, and was presently raised on the shoulders of Sir Wyatt and His Grace of Escombe and borne triumphantly down to the dining-room and placed in a chair of honor at the supper-table, whence, what with toasts, songs, stories, acclaims, wonders, amazements, applause, Florence wine, cards, etc., etc., this gallant company did not arise (or some of them slip under) until seven on Monday morning.

Her Ladyship got up from the mahogany with but one-pound-ten in her pockets, and a surmise in her head as to how far this sum would take her on her homeward way.

But homeward way there could be none just yet, for before too many bumpers had been filled and drunk, Beau Brummell had made proposition of a

most lively affair, which indeed he had already set afoot, for the celebrating of Sir Robin's restoration to his friends by the timely arrival and prowess of Sir Percy. This was nothing else than going to Vauxhall by water on Tuesday night, and in masques. A score of ladies and gentlemen had been bidden to join, including the Ladies Diana and Biddy, the Honorable Dolly, the Misses Lovell, Lady Chelmsford, with Lady Brookwood to act as duenna for the unmarried fair.

In vain Lady Peggy protested, swore she could not, would not. These gentlemen would not take no for an answer, and once again Her Ladyship perceived, as she reluctantly acceded to the masquerade, how far more difficult 'twas to be out of breeches than into 'em.

Percy was to be there, at least he was invited; so much she knew from Mr. Brummell, and, as Lady Diana was positive to come up to town for such a novelty as a party in masquerade, of course her suitor was certain to attend her.

Very well! Why should she, whose whole life was to be passed in the compounding of cream-

cheeses and the visiting of poor old women, not give to herself one more cause of vain regretting? one more glimpse of him she adored?

At that hour, when Mr. Brummell and his guests were doing honor to the supposed Sir Robin, the real Baronet was called upon to receive two most lamentable-looking blackguards who followed the Boots up to the gentleman's room, unheeding both remonstrances and ugly words on the way thither.

At sight of Mr. Bloksey and his companion-in-arms, each lame, bound-up and wound-up of leg and back, with their bonnets pulled down over their brows, Sir Robin skipped from his easy-chair with a gasp, half terrified at the appearance, wholly eager to learn the outcome of the plot.

"Hist!" cries he, under his breath, and pointing to the door, finger on lip.

"Heh?" responds the villain. "There's no fear here. We's well enough known down in our own neighbor'ood, but up 'ere we passes for two pious beggars wot lives by h'alms from the parish church!"

A grim smile from his partner confirms this re-

mark, and Sir Robin, thus reassured, says tremblingly:

"Well, 'tis done?"

"'Tis done," both nodding in concert, "and," adds Mr. Bloksey, "we're both nigh done too! Wot with bullets apiece h'inside of us from the gentleman's pistols, and wot with gettin' our h'eyes knocked h'out of us, and most bein' caught by the Watch when we was a-lowerin' Lord Gower's heir h'into the Thames, we're 'ere, Sir Robin McTart, to 'umbly remind you that we wants more."

The Baronet shakes his head, hands thrust in pockets, clutching purse and pence.

"Oh, no," answers he, "the job was paid for in advance, my good men. Not another groat will you get."

"Werry good," murmurs Bloksey, turning on his slip-shod heel. "We'll just go down to the round house, and if it turns out as Your Lordship gets h'admission to the Tower free, you needn't be too much surprised. We doesn't mind a-tellin' 'ow we saw you a-prickin' Sir Percy de Bohun last night! and a-weightin' of his mangled corp, and a-throwin' of the same h'into the river at the old

Dove Pier!—Oh, no! we doesn't!" This at the door-sill.

"What! what! you knaves! Here, come back! Come back, I say!" shrieks the terrified little gentleman, seizing a shoulder of each and forcing them into seats.

After which simple application of primary methods, Mr. Bloksey and his friend find no difficulties whatever in the way of wresting from their patron another hundred pounds, with which they make off, again and again rehearsing to him how great risks they had run in decently interring the body of his hated rival.

Once rid of them, Sir Robin rose, stretched himself, and yawned.

'Twas an abject soul, one of those creatures born of a good and honest stock on either side, which sometimes cumber the earth as if in ribald jest against the accepted laws of birth and breeding.

With no misgiving, save that of a possible detection, Sir Robin, now that this even had been disposed of at an expense of a hundred guineas, felt nothing if not jubilant, and on the morrow proceeded to order him a suit of satins in crimson,

a hat of the latest fashion, ruffles, cravats, silk hose, a muff, and a lot of other fallals at Monsieur Jabot's in Holborn. For the Baronet, freed, as he fancied, of his enemy, and feeling positive that Lady Peggy would soon, out of the overflow of her vast affection for him, contrive a message through her obliging Mr. Incognito, desired to be equipped in the latest mode for that summons to his Lady's presence, which he believed must ultimately, and perhaps presently, arrive.

It is true, he expected that his entrance into the gay world of fashion, which, he promised himself by way of introduction, should be at Vauxhall, might be a bit hampered by the accounts he must hear of the sudden disappearance of Sir Percy de Bohun, but this seemed a trifle in the path of a gentleman for whose sake Lady Peggy Burgoyne had come up to town, remained invisible, employed an Incognito as Mercury, and of whose name, albeit falsely, the prints had made most marvelous mention.

Now, Sir Robin had not seen the tenth part of these last. No, not any of 'em, in truth, save the one he had shown to Her Ladyship the evening

they had encountered each other at the Dove Pier. To be entirely candid, Sir Robin was an indifferent scholar; write he could not; to read was a plague which he willingly deputed, when it was necessary, to his former instructor—that patient, worthy man, the Vicar of Friskingdean, incumbent of the living next Robinswold.

This one was even now, so Sir Robin had got word, up in London to consult a great man for the benefit of his eyes, and 'twas presently agreed between 'em at the Bishop, where the Vicar stopped, that they should proceed together to Vauxhall on the Tuesday night.

"I have heard, my dear Robin," observed the excellent old man, "that there is to be a rare sight in the gardens that evening, nothing less than a most curious novelty just come into vogue in the world of fashion."

"Ha, and what's that, Sir?" inquires the Baronet.

"A party of Beau Brummell's to come by water to the pier, every soul of 'em in masks,—Lords, Ladies, and all persons of the first quality; some of the names I heard in the coffee-room. There's

to be Sir Wyatt Lovell, the Earl of Escombe, Lady Diana Weston, Lady Chelmsford, Lord Kennaston of Kennaston—"

"Hold, Sir!" cried the Baronet, jumping about the room, like one demented, the idea bouncing into his pate that if Kennaston is to be there, his twin-sister will also form one of the distinguished party. "What's to prevent me buying a couple of masks and, with our cloaks set out by our swords, a-joining in this gay diversion?" The little gentleman's eyes twinkle with sweet anticipation.

"But," hesitates the Vicar, "would such levity be counted seemly for one of my years and profession?"

"Tut, tut, Sir," cries Sir Robin, "I'll not take a refusal. Hark ye, I have reasons," adds he mysteriously. "There's one of the Fair likely to be present who pines to see me, Sir, and whom I yearn to behold once more. There hath been an obstacle," continues the cold-blooded monkey, "but Providence hath removed it. I pray of you accompany me, Sir, and t'will lead mayhap to banns bein' read on Sunday se'ennight in the church at Friskingdean."

The Vicar, being carried away by two natural and one of 'em a most laudable emotion, at last consented. He was quite in fatherly sympathy with his old pupil's ambition to settle in life, and he had that curious hankering after just a nibble at the edge of the flesh-pots of Egypt, which is not uncommon to gentlemen of even his sedate years and failing sight.

Sir Robin bought masks and cloaks of black and ordered them sent to the Bishop, where he had agreed to sup on Tuesday and go thence by land to Vauxhall. Indeed he had just now come out of the draper's shop and turned down toward the Vicar's inn, when he caught sight of Lady Peggy walking swiftly from him. She had been buying stains for her skin and eyebrows.

"Mr. Incognito!" cried he, scampering hither and yon, into the kennel, onto the path, jostling fair ladies' chairs, running into a porter's pack, thumping a horse in the nose with his ill-worn weapon, and, finally, gaining on the one he pursues, and dealing Her Ladyship's shoulder no gentle blow.

"Ha, there!" cries she, turning, hand on hilt.

Then, perceiving who 'tis, she almost shudders and draws up to her full height.

"Dear Mr. Incognito," pants Sir Robin, "how fares My Lady? Tell me, I beseech you!"

"She fares but ill, Sir," answers she, making to proceed.

"No, no, not so fast, I implore; oh, Sir, I die for her!"

"Very well, Sir, she is willing. I am pressed for time and must away."

"One word. You say she's willing I should die for her?"

"Oh, Sir Robin, importune me no further. I know not what she's willing for!"

"Now, now," soothes the Baronet. "We're well met, Mr. Incognito, that I'm assured of; and that Lady Peggy'd far rather I'd live than die for her," leers he, "since for the sake of communicating with me she's at, no doubt, great expenses in maintaining you?"

At this Her Ladyship laughs, as many a lady may do any day, at the strange construction a man who is blessed with vanity contrives to put upon her actions.

"'Tis so, I know't!" exclaims he, grinning unctuously. "Now, Sir, tell me, goes she—" his voice sinks to a whisper as he applies his mouth nigh to Peg's ear—"goes she to Vauxhall in Beau Brummell's party, along with her brother, o' Tuesday night?"

A thousand thoughts rush helter-skelter through Her Ladyship's brain, pro and con the answering of this query.

Presently, sedately, at the corner of the street, says she, with no smallest notion of the import or the outcome of her words, merely uttered as a light and easy means of make-off:

"Go and see!" and she disappears from view.

"By jingo!" rattles the gentleman from Kent to himself, as he jumps into a hackney-coach and tools out to the Puffled Hen. "But she loves me! Curse me! but I believe she's had that incognito rascal at upwards probably of ten shillings a day, just on purpose to watch for my appearance, and so to glean tidings of my welfare! Without a doubt 'tis by her commands he said that 'go and see.' Zounds! I'll do't, with the Vicar to bear me out," adds this prudent lover, "should any dis-

agreeable incident occur between me and any one of these coxcombs with their town ways. Damn 'em, tho'! with a secret affair going on betwixt me and Peggy, I can snap my fingers at His Gracious Majesty himself, should we encounter!"

Well pleased, therefore, with himself, Sir Robin descended at the Puffled Hen and bestowed upon the cabman out of that abundance of the heart which occasionally causes the pocket, as well as the heart, to speak—two-pence.

XIV

In this same Sir Robin believes he meets his Fair: and Lady Biddy O'Toole is the means of putting the whole Gardens into a vast commotion.

After quitting Sir Robin, Her Ladyship, jingling the few shillings that now remained to her, since purchasing unguents and the mask and cloak necessary for the approaching festivity, suddenly made up her mind to escape at once, to leave the bundle of her clothes, her shorn tresses, and whatever else beside to tell what tale they might, and, here and now, to shake the dust of London from her feet forever. And to this end she was about to summon a chair to start her as far on her journey as her purse would permit, when out comes

Mr. Brummell himself from the shop of Monsieur Jabot, and links his arm in her's with his accustomed pleasant familiarity and easy condescension.

"'Pon honor!" exclaims the Beau. "Well met, Sir! Since you were nigh hanged, Sir, I've not had too much of your agreeable company. I'd have you know I'm just from Monsieur Jabot's back room, where, the whiles I took a dish of tea, I explained the riddles of your most amazin' twist of the lace. Faith, Robin, 'twas a lucky hour for me, when, having left a pile of failures, so high! in the corner of my dressing-room, I beheld your cravat and bade my man knock you down!"

Lady Peggy laughs. The cool audacity of Beau Brummell is a relief after the mawkish sighs of the little scoundrel she has just parted from, and, hoping that Mr. Brummell will soon spy either one of the Fair or a Royal Highness, and so be diverted from her side, she bows and answers:

"Robin McTart must ever account that a lucky day for him, Sir!"

"Hark ye, my young buck," proceeds the Beau. "Monsieur Jabot is so enchanted with your manner of the cravat that to-day, with my compli-

ments, he introduces it at Court! And since I've been seen with it," adds he pompously, "'tis sure, by this day week, to be the height of the mode!"

"Aye?" responds Her Ladyship, a-wondering how she can best get away.

"Aye!" echoes her companion in a monstrous amazement. "Rot me! Sir, but such a distinction's not often conferred upon a young gentleman up in town for the first time. What's the matter with you, boy?" cries he, turning to observe Her Ladyship's somewhat absent-minded aspect.

"Naught, I swear!" cries she, recovering herself.

"'Sdeath! Robin, are ye in love?" asks the Beau, taking a pinch of snuff and tendering his box, as, attended by all eyes, the two make their way down Piccadilly, betwixt ogling ladies in their chairs and chariots, gallants, dowagers; each, all, mincing and la-la-ing as they go.

Her Ladyship inclines her head. She is well pleased to speak truth when she can.

"By Gad! Mr. Brummell, you've hit the mark," says she.

"Sleep not o' nights? fickle at your meat? wake sighing? dream of patches, smiles, and dainty

fingers? mistrust yourself? easily affronted? believe the whole world's pointing at you in raillery? take no pleasure in horse, man, gun or dog? loathe all the Fair, save one? love solitude?"

Her Ladyship's feign to smile in the midst of the snuff, which she abhors, and has only taken because she had to. Sneezing, she nods as her companion continues:

"Hate company? are cursin' me now for an addle-pated fool, and wishing I'd leave you to yourself, eh? Don't answer. I know it, Robin, well; a thousand times, more or less, have I been where you stand to-day, and had just cause, I fancied, to damn the Prince himself, since that which I was then pleased to dub his foolish prattle served to distract my ruminations from whichever Lady 'twas at the moment claimed my fancy. I cursed him then, Sir, for clinging to my arm, but now I bless him, as you will me some future day—for, Robin, hark ye, there's not one of the jades but deceives us, no, Sir! and I'm goin' to hang on to you, Sir, for keepin' of you out of the vapors. Zounds, Sir! I'll not leave you to any such ill company as himself proves to a young man in your

predicament. Come, Sir, come; we'll up and into Will's, and there, me stickin' faster than a burr, we'll home to Peter's Court and with a merry lot of gentlemen make a pretty night of't against to-morrow with its evening at Vauxhall."

With which pleasant and most well-intentioned sally, Lady Peggy again finds herself constrained to put off that redemption of her true estate for which she so deeply yearns.

Mr. Brummell's party went by water to Vauxhall, and 'twas indeed a heavenly night for such an expedition, with no large lady-moon a-staring, but the rather a thin slip of a silver damsel hanging in the vault, and millions of stars a-waiting on her, not any of these a-revealing too much or a-telling any tales if a gentleman's hand chanced to come in contact with a lady's amid the folds of brocade, or under the long cloth of the black, crimson or blue cloaks in which all these merry masqueraders were enveloped.

Sir Percy de Bohun was beside Lady Diana Weston; Peggy noted the same with jealous, despairing eyes; while at the left of Lord Brookwood's daughter sat her own twin—only the second

time she had seen him since the memorable night in Lark Lane; nor did she see him plainly now, for all the company had set forth in their masks, and only removed them between whiles to gain a breath of fresh air. 'Twas expected that the larger number of the party would meet them at the Gardens, and thereafter the sport and mystification would begin.

So it turned out; not only all the rest of Mr. Brummell's friends in their cloaks and masks, with glimpse now and then of satins, taffetas, laces, ribands, jeweled stomachers, bodices ablaze, and so forth, but a vast assemblage of other folk also awaited the arrival of the Beau's barge at the bottom of the Gardens.

Among these, two lurked in the shadow of the trees; they were Sir Robin and the Vicar. The former noted with deep joy that he had, by a happy chance, chosen a crimson color for his new suit, exactly corresponding to that of one of these gallants; that his cloak of sable hue was also quite the ton, and that he could thus, with ease, mingle with the party, and presently, no doubt, either discover Lady Peggy's identity, or, more than likely,

she herself would disclose the same to him, and at last reward his faithfulness and patience. No qualm visited the little gentleman's conscience-pocket with regard to his supposed victim, although, it is true, he had given him a vicious thought as he had stood near the river's bank waiting for Mr. Brummell's barge to come in sight. So had Peggy, as she was being rowed past the old Dove Pier; into her mind and into Sir Percy's had come the memory of the Sunday night, but he spoke of it no more than, certes, did she.

Sir Robin, his cup overflowing with pleasurable anticipation and the gratified sense that the one who had sworn to take his life lay, fish-food, at the bottom of the Thames, flitted hither and yon, dragging the bewildered Vicar of Friskingdean in his wake.

Wherever the company of Mr. Brummell wandered, there followed, hanging on to the fringe, as 'twere, these two, whom presently one-half the guests accepted as a matter of course to be of themselves.

First, always followed by an admiring and gaping crowd, 'twas up and down the formal Walks

somewhat sedately, for the masquerade, as has been said before, was at that period but just coming into vogue, and fine ladies and gentlemen were, at the outset of an evening, not as easy in their disguises as they became after a promenade in the unaccustomed duds; then, they formed a circle of mysterious appearance around the orchestra; then, 'twas into the Room to stare at the pictures through the peepholes of their masks; then a rush to gaze at the Cascade, which the whole of them, save Lady Peggy, Sir Robin and the Vicar, had seen a hundred times before; later, 'twas up and down the Walks again; and here Sir Robin at last made bold, having long since joined himself and the somewhat reluctant Vicar to a group of the Beau's company, to address a few words, as it chanced, to the lively Lady Biddy O'Toole!

It had seemed to him, after a careful survey of all, and having been able, by dint of his ears, to learn which was Kennaston, whose was the only personality so far in his possession, that Lady Biddy's arch turn of the head was the most like to belong to the object of his passion. So up he springs, mincing, leaving the Vicar to huddle in

the shade, and, pulling Her Ladyship's mask-riband with a twitching finger and thumb, as he had seen others do just now, he said, very low, in her ear:

"I'm sure I know who Your Ladyship is!"

"Out with it," says she, very low too.

"It's she whose image is writ on my heart," answers he.

"Sure," answers she, "that's a thing that can never be known until you're dead, and maybe not as soon, since the surgeons don't cut up everybody! Lud, Sir, give me your name, and we'll talk of your heart anon."

"I am Sir Robin McTart of Robinswold, Kent," exclaims he, feeling positive that this saucy minx is none other than his adored, for be it remembered Lady Biddy spoke under her breath and with a disguised tone to her voice.

"'Od's blood!" now whispers Her Ladyship, with an accent of mock terror, into Sir Robin's ear. "You! the highwayman! the cut-throat! the robber! what, I've heard, sticks gentlemen in the back, or has your men do it for you, and profits by that same!" laughing fit to kill herself.

But the little man does not laugh; the cold sweat stands out all over his sallow countenance, and he's so terrified, recalling the threats of Mr. Bloksey, that he stands stock-still, and really can not move a leg.

They are nigh the Dark Walks as Sir Robin comes to his halt, and Lady Biddy, not pausing even to note his silence, goes merrily on with her most apt discourse.

"Oh," proceeds she, "but you are the hero of the day, Sir Robin, and it's myself that's proud to be in your company, and faith! I'd like to have died running to see you hang on Saturday last!"

"Hang!" gasps he, getting back the use of his voice, but not of his shaking legs. "Saturday last!"

"Don't be that bashful, Sir Robin, making as if you'd never heard of such before!" And Lady Biddy gives the Baronet's cloak a playful tweak. "Lud, Sir! you and Sir Percy de Bohun's the two most talked about, of all the bucks in town!"

"Sir Percy de Bohun!" repeats he, his knees knocking together.

"Sure'n didn't he save you from the gibbet?

Oh, go-along with you, Sir Robin, you can't palaver Lady—"

"Lady who?" he contrives to ejaculate, struck nearly dumb at this mention of his rival, while Lady Biddy now bridles and is mute.

"You are Lady Peggy Burgoyne, are you not?" he goes on more softly, bending toward his companion, and concluding at last that the Lady's words must have been the mere hap-hazards of a sparkling disposition.

Now Lady Biddy, in common with other ladies of fashion and moving in certain high circles of society, had heard a deal of the mysterious and all unseen Lady Peggy. She well knew the supposition that was rife as to Lady Peggy's being secretly the wife of Sir Robin McTart. She knew from her bosom friend, Lady Diana Weston, who had the same most direct from her suitor, Lord Kennaston, Lady Peggy's own twin-brother, that his sister was from home, unknown her whereabouts to father or mother, kith or kin, maid or man, save that she was "up in London"; that Sir Percy de Bohun was mad for love and loss of her;

that her brother, had he not been in like case by means of Lady Diana, would long since have made public search, as he was indeed making such privately, for the discovery of the eloping Fair. She likewise was aware that Sir Robin frequented the gay world, was not adverse to ogling a lady, as she herself could testify; stopped at Mr. Brummell's house; and, albeit 'twas said had fought a duel with Sir Percy because of Lady Peggy, still did not absent himself from any rout, ridotto, or ball, on her always absent account.

So, equipped with such a fund of knowledge and any amount of surmise, Her Ladyship replied coyly beneath her mask:

"Why do you think so, Sir Robin, and pray if I were Lady Peggy, what, now, would you be afther saying to me?"

"Zounds! 'tis she!" exclaims the Baronet, carried away by the fact that Lady Biddy's hand beneath her cloak has more than half-way met his own moist and trembling fingers.

"Loveliest of women! Oh, 'twas indeed by your express directions, was't not, that Mr. Incognito

on Monday, watching for me in High Holborn nigh the shop of Mounseer Jabot, bid me come here to-night to meet you?"

Lady Biddy, although much averse to the clammy touch of her cavalier, gives his fingers an assuring pressure.

"Why, oh, why!" pursues Sir Robin, now as much elated by this tacit confession of her passion for him, as he was but lately overwhelmed by the mention of such strange words as "hanging, highwayman, Sir Percy de Bohun," etc., etc., "why have you seen fit to keep me in such a length of suspense? Why have I not been allowed, before this, to behold you, and renew the days of our sojourn in Kent? Speak, my angel, speak!"

"La, Sir!" murmurs Lady Biddy, minx-like, ever anxious to get at the heart of this now much deepened enigma, "la, Sir, do you not know but too well the whys and wherefores of my secrecy?" Her Ladyship from Cork actually squeezes the little Baronet's crooked little hand.

"That do I not! Mr. Incognito never would tell me aught, but thus and so; and bade me, from your adorable lips, keep myself in seclusion and safety,

—nor ever," continues he, his tone sinking to a mere breath, "endanger my precious self," now stooping to imprint a chaste kiss on Her Ladyship's hand, "in the meeting even once of Sir Percy de Bohun, for he had sworn to kill me on beholding me. Dearest life," proceeds Sir Robin, withdrawing Lady Biddy a bit into the shade of the great trees, "I have obeyed your commands. I have never set eyes upon the scoundrel, but have kept myself close housed at my inn in Pimlico, awaiting your dear pleasure."

"Have ye?" murmurs Lady Biddy, now more bewildered than she ever was before in her life, and seeing no clear way, either to read the puzzle or, truth to tell, to elude the gentleman. Yet the wits of a lady, especially if she happen to have been born in Ireland, may usually be trusted to extricate her from almost any dilemma; therefore, when Sir Robin has done swearing of his impatient probation passed at the Puffled Hen, says she, tweaking her hoop and making a courtesy:

"Lud! Robin," (the hussy!) "but you are a killing creature! Nay, nay!" drawing out a few steps, he after her, from the shade of the trees

and more in the flare of the twinkling globe lamps. "Nay, tarry here but a moment; there are the same reasons for your not accompanying me now that have prevailed upon me to keep our matters secret hitherto. I pray you, stir not from the neighborhood of this wooden lion—see?—until I return, which I will do presently."

"Faith!" cries the Baronet, "I'll not budge, my divine Peggy! until you are once more at my side!" and with a horrid leer through his peep-holes, he essays to take Lady Biddy's hand once more, but she's off, balking him.

Quick as thought, she scampered across to the edge of the orchestra, where she discovered a group of masks and among 'em one, whom, by the rose pinned to her bloom-colored bodice, she knew to be Lady Diana, and she made certain that two of the three bloods near her, canes dangling at their button-holes, must be Sir Percy and Lord Kennaston.

"Hist!" exclaims Lady Biddy, panting partly from speed, partly from the fright a lady alone might experience in running the gauntlet of so many macaronis and fops, not to speak of thieves

and pickpockets, as perforce was the case in progressing about Vauxhall.

"What is't Biddy, for I know you by your silver heels," answers Lady Di. "Mischief, I'll dare be sworn, or it's not you! Speak your mind; there's none here but what can keep a secret, and the whole of us have been a-watching you with some one, fie! at the entrance to the Dark Alleys."

"Is Sir Percy here? Is this he?" whispers Biddy.

Sir Percy bows, for he is there; while the other two gentlemen, inferring from her tone that she seeks a private ear, instantly withdraw to one of the boxes for a glass of Burgundy to refresh their spirits.

"I've news for you, of one you're a-dyin' for, of Lady Peggy Burgoyne!" exclaims she triumphantly.

"What! What!" comes simultaneously from behind each of the masks she addresses.

"Aye; I'm after learning from, whom, think you?"

"Proceed, for the love of God, Madam!" says Percy, very low.

"From him that's supposed to be her husband, Sir Robin McTart, that mistook me for her," Biddy titters, "that she's here to-night by an appointment with him, made by a trusted servant of hers, called 'Mr. Incognito'; sent to meet Sir Robin before the shop of Monsieur Jabot in Holborn; and he's not seen Her Ladyship,—I mean Sir Robin's not seen her since they were sojourning in Kent together! and there's a mystery for you! And I made excuses and left him a-standin' by the lion, for I could no longer contain the news, but must run back to him now to extract the rest of it. Pray heaven, Lady Peggy herself comes not by, and let's out that I was not she at all, at all!"

"Good God!" murmurs Percy under his breath, as Biddy rattles on. "Can this thing be? and what does it all mean?"

Restraining Lady Biddy, both he and Lady Diana endeavor to quiet her abounding spirits, and to gain from her the detailed account of her encounter with Sir Robin. Percy, in the midst of her voluble tongue and her giggling, striving to form some plan of action which shall this night bring matters to the touch between himself and

the Baronet and leave one or t'other of 'em stiff and stark.

Meantime, Sir Robin, with greedy eyes fixed on Lady Biddy, so long as he can see her, and until she and her companions withdraw into a box, stands as if at one with the wooden lion; presently, however, his gaze is diverted hither and yon, not only by the playful and engaging remarks of various young ladies who challenge his mask in the most direct and obliging fashion, but by a certain Figure which he beholds moving about aimlessly, it would seem, and alone, beneath the dark shadows of the trees toward the river.

There is something in this Figure's motions, although cloaked and masked,—therefore, the Baronet notes, one of Mr. Brummell's party,—which strikes him as familiar, and when, presently, the unknown lifts mask and reveals the countenance behind it, Sir Robin sidles up, one eye on the wooden lion of his tryst, however, and plucking Lady Peggy by the arm, says:

"Ho! Mr. Incognito!"

Peggy turns, and betwixt disgust, dismay, horror, and amusement, remains silent.

"'Tis I, Sir, Robin McTart," lifting his own mask a trifle to assure his companion of his identity.

"Soh!" returns she, "I do perceive."

"Oh, Mr. Incognito, what do I not owe to your being in My Lady's employ! She is indeed here."

Her Ladyship, taking this for a question, answers thus, with emphasis: "Yes, she's here—indeed."

"I have seen her," sighs the little Baronet, leaning his head, just exactly the height of Her Ladyship's own, down on Peggy's shoulder in an excess of sensibility.

"Have you?" exclaims she, not daring to stir in the embarrassment of believing it possible that the scoundrel has discovered her identity.

"Oh, yes," sighs Sir Robin, "I have received a pressure, nay two of 'em, from her hand. I've kissed her fingers; I await her return to meet me at the wooden lion yonder."

"Do you?" says Lady Peggy, mystified beyond everything. "Did she look as you expected her to?"

"Ah!" gasps Sir Robin, "she has not yet lifted her mask for me to behold her countenance, but

when she returns, I shall beseech her for one glimpse!"

"Ah!" returns Peggy, now fully persuaded that some one has been making a jest of her companion, but none the less disquieted on her own score.

"Hark ye, Sir Robin," says she, "you have ever found my counsels wise. Be advised by me now; leave Vauxhall at once. Lady Peggy Burgoyne is not safe, so long as you tarry here."

The little Baronet, doughtily, although trembling, puts his hand to his hilt.

"Nay, Sir!" continues Peg, "your weapon would not avail for her preservation. She leaves town this very night for Kennaston. Do you the same, nor risk detection longer here." Her Ladyship uses the word advisedly, and has the satisfaction of seeing Sir Robin shiver with terror, then steady again as he reflects that Her Ladyship's fears can but be in connection with her own escapade; since, 'tis plain from all he can spy and eavesdrop, not a soul as yet has missed Sir Percy de Bohun from his accustomed haunts.

"But she swore me she'd be back in a few moments, Mr. Incognito, and 'sdeath! Sir!" per-

ceiving Lady Biddy emerging from the box and advancing toward the lion alone, "there she is!"

Off and away Sir Robin McTart to join his Fair, while Lady Peggy, screened by the increasing shadows, for the dripping lamps are one by one, by this, dying down in their globes, beholds one—she devines not which—of Beau Brummell's lady guests, courtesying and greeting the Baronet with her finger-tips.

Now My Lady's heart's a-thumping monstrous hard; she beholds, as well as Sir Robin and his supposed Peggy, two others—alas! she knows too well who they are, a-peeping out from the corner of the box-entrance whence Lady Biddy came just now, and watching her encounter with Sir Robin.

These are Lady Diana and Sir Percy.

Together? Aye and a-goin' to be "together" for all their lives, she sadly thinks, both of them, quite forgetting, save perchance for a moment's beguilement, her very existence. But it behooves her, if not for her own sake, of which she has come to the pass of recking but little, then for her father's and mother's, now to bid farewell forever to dis-

guises, falsehoods, cheatings, man's estate, and even the melancholy chance of seeing the countenance of Sir Percy. She will off presently, and reach home as best she may.

A few minutes, more or less, can make no odds, and 'tis but too true that Her Ladyship stood there in ambush of the branches in the vain hope that Percy might lift his mask, if but for an instant, and thus allow her parting gaze to rest upon his features.

It is quite true that mortals, although in never such haste to reach a desired crisis, still ofttimes halt at the threshhold of its attainment; so Her Ladyship, with now nothing to hinder her escape, still stood leaning against an oak, listless, but for the eager eyes fixed on the pair in the box entrance. These presently crossed into the throng and, joining others of the maskers, were lost to her view; but the Baronet and Lady Biddy had not been idle of their tongues this while.

Much simpering, angling for news, tittering, and a neat show of wit in the manner of plying a gentleman with questions on a matter about which

he was quite ignorant, on the lady's side; ardor, impatience, as much daring as his little spirit permitted, on the gentleman's. Finally said he:

"Mr. Incognito says you start for Kennaston this very night, my dearest life, is't so?"

"Tell me who is Mr. Incognito?" says she, "and I'll answer you straight."

"He's your paid servant, sworn slave, and the bearer of all tender messages between us.—Now, go you to Kennaston to-night?"

"As sure as I'm Lady Peggy Burgoyne," returns Biddy. "I start for home ere cock-crow!"

"I'll follow you poste-haste, but," cries Sir Robin, "loveliest of created beings, I beseech, I implore! one glimpse of your angelic countenance before we part—to meet only when I can claim you as my own!"

"No! No!" exclaims Biddy, restraining the Baronet's hand which is laid upon the lutestring of her mask.

"But divine creature, I insist!" with one arm seizing the buxom Lady Biddy about the waist, while with the other he essays to untie the riband which hides her charms from view.

Then Lady Biddy O'Toole, whose lungs were of the best, let such a bawl as rang far up and down the Thames, causing a score of red-stockinged boatmen to leave their wherries and dash up the Gardens; causing every tongue in Vauxhall to cease clacking, every glass to jingle to its table, every echo to resound; every other lady there to shriek; the musicians to stop; the waiters to drop their trays; each gentleman to draw sword; and a vast number of persons of both sexes to shout:

"Watch! Watch! Murder! Thieves! Highwaymen!" and whatever else beside.

While a concourse of people of every condition at once closed in around Sir Robin and Lady Biddy, at the outside rim of which, shivering betwixt terror and that lively curiosity which overrides even a desire for personal safety, gaped the now unmasked Vicar of Friskingdean, unable to find his natural protector and sometime pupil in all this hurly-burly.

XV

Wherein Sir Percy and Sir Robin come face to face, to the unfeigned amazement of each: and where My Lady takes to her heels and a wherry.

When Lady Diana and Percy quitted the box, he, after conducting her to the care of Lady Brookwood, strode off into the Dark Alleys, taking with him, not Kennaston, for the hopeless youth, flouted still by Diana, had gone a-mooning by the river's bank, but a company of valiant and merry gentlemen all raised a bit by the partaking of the famous Vauxhall punch; and to them he confided sufficient of his reasons and intentions, as made plain their course to them as his friends, to do aught and all in their several powers toward the promot-

ing of a quarrel betwixt him and Sir Robin McTart; whom, he would presently point out to them, as they should stroll, seeming careless, the length of the walk.

Thus, arm in arm, Sir Percy, Sir Wyatt Lovell, His Grace of Escombe, and Mr. Jack Chalmers, across the path, swaggering with sticks and tassels hanging, hats at a cock, perfumed with Venus oil, and most jocund of demeanor; with Beau Brummell behind 'em spying, waving his little muff, and chatting with Lord Wootton and one or two more gay sparks, all disporting themselves carelessly, but hilts eased for the drawing.

Just as they were nearing the wooden lion of Sir Robin's tryst, Lady Biddy's shriek assailed their ears, and Sir Percy, thanking Providence for so opportune an occurrence, which, not to say that it was in any way premeditated, yet continued to ring out louder and louder, even after Sir Robin had ceased to pull at her mask-string and stood, held fast in Her Ladyship's stout grasp, the very center of a blaze of light from footmen's flambeaux,—they and the masses pushing every way, screaming and cursing.

Into the thick of this mêlée dashed Sir Percy de Bohun, with his friends on either side of him.

But a moment sufficed for him to wrest the Lady from her assailant and to deliver her over to the care of Diana and the Duchess, who carried her swooning (whether with laughter or emotion 'twould be difficult to set down), to the Room.

In another second, taking his silver-fringed gloves from his pocket he threw them into the masked face of Sir Robin McTart.

The little Baronet, who had both temper and vanity, which brace now got the upperhand of his cowardice, and, believing that Lady Peggy's eyes were upon him, that Sir Percy was at the bottom of the Thames, and with full foreknowledge that he could run away before the meeting could be arranged, caught the gloves as they struck and flung them back into their owner's covered countenance.

"Take that! 'sdeath!" squeaked Sir Robin, now much the more valiant as he beheld the Vicar screwing his way toward him through the excited crowds.

"Unmask, and show yourself for who you are!"

cried Percy, every one of his companions echoing:

"Unmask! Unmask! Unmask, or we'll run ye!"

"Willingly," responded the trembling gentleman from Kent, tugging at the slip-knot in his mask-string.

"I am Sir Robin McTart! Who, the devil, are you?"

"I am Sir Percy de Bohun!" replied his opponent, as both masks came off at the same instant, and the two confronted one another, staring with four eyes that fairly popped in their sockets.

'Twould be hard to say which of these two was the more astounded, although Sir Percy's amazement had quite a different flavor from the Baronet's abject terror.

"You! Sir Percy de Bohun!" he quavered, turning ashy pale. "I'll not believe it. 'Tis a lie!"

"You! Sir Robin McTart!" replied Percy, hotly. "Gentlemen," turning to his friends, "I pray you bear me out in this, not to the exclusion of my challenge of this impostor, which holds good until one or t'other of us sheds blood, but for the preservation of the honor of a valiant gentleman,

who is not far off of us now. That this weazen wretch may meet his dues, for not only does he masquerade his face, but seeks to usurp the character and name of one whom we all know to be both handsome, brave and courageous."

Percy's blood runs high as he speaks these generous words, while every soul about him stands breathless, staring, struck dumb with the singularity of the episode.

"But I am Sir Robin McTart," cries the Baronet, brandishing his weapon with a will, since there is none to oppose him, and the Vicar, now, although well-nigh choked, not above ten yards distant from him.

"Tut, tut, Sir, whoever you are," interposed Lord Escombe. "Your game's up, and you'd better give your lies a rest."

"Hold!" cries Sir Percy to Robin, "whoever you are, I challenge you to fight me ten minutes hence, yonder in the open, towards the river, and those ten minutes my friends and I'll spend in calling the actual Sir Robin McTart into your presence, and confronting your impudence with his reality. Lend me your lungs, My Lords and

"I am Sir Robin McTart! Who, the devil, are you?"

Gentlemen; Sir Robin's in call somewhere in the Gardens as we all know."

And with one accord the shout went up, ringing up and down the river and far across to the highway, where it caused the horse-patrol to think that every highwayman in the kingdom had broken loose upon Vauxhall, and presently brought them rearing, plunging, swearing, firing, thumping cutlasses right and left, into the midst of the surging thousands, by this all shouting:

"Sir Robin McTart! Sir Robin McTart! Sir Robin! Sir Robin! Sir Robin McTart!" at the top of their voices.

But for all their bawling, no one answered, no one came, and but one of the vast throng went.

This was Lady Peggy, at a loss to know the meaning of the shouts, not having been near enough to the scene of the encounter to learn its purport, and only now realizing that 'twas herself was sought and meant by the concerted cry that rent the air. Scenting a new if unknown danger, she followed her woman's instinct, and, in the waiting pause that succeeded the tumultuous call, Peggy fled to the landing, pressed a handful of

shillings, almost her last, into the palm of the only boatman there, jumped into the wherry and bade him get her as swiftly as he could to Queenhithe Stairs; for determined was she, now more than ever, to leave no traces in her wake, and to return, at all risks, to Mr. Brummell's house for her bundle of woman's clothes.

For a long way down the Thames the renewed cry of the Vauxhall crush rang in her distracted ears:

"Sir Robin McTart! Sir Robin McTart! Sir Robin! Sir Robin! Where are you? Come forth! Show yourself!"

But none other came forth, and the Baronet, taking such courage as he might through his astonishment at Sir Percy's being alive,—and not forgetting, even at this point, to reckon how much the lying assassins had mulcted him of, now, in the second breathless halt of the calling his own name, waved his weapon and answered it, saying again:

"I am Sir Robin McTart!"

"Prove it," shouted Chalmers, with a derisive shrug.

"Faith! and so he can by me!" exclaimed the panting Vicar, as, borne rather by the surging of the people than by his slender legs, the tenant of the cloth was pitched somewhat unceremoniously head-first into his pupil's middle. Sputtering, but yet winning the attention which truth and the clergy usually and righteously obtain, the Vicar raised his right hand, and, laying his left on the Baronet's shoulder, he spoke:

"This is Sir Robin McTart of Robinswold, Kent. I have known him from his birth; his father before him; he has been my pupil. Who dares use his name than himself is an impostor and a thief!"

"What!" and now comes forward Mr. Brummell with open hand. "And my old friend," says he, "'sdeath, Mr. What's-your-name, you were a curate when we met last, twenty years ago, but I remember you, Sir, at Robinswold. So this," surveying the Baronet, "is my old friend's son and heir? Of a truth he favors his sire more than the pretty young rapscallion that's been a-fooling us all for now these four weeks past; for gentlemen," adds the Beau, turning to Sir Percy, "'tis as well we confess ourselves to have been duped. Gad,

Sir," this *sotto voce* to Percy alone, "I always wondered where Sir Hector found that handsome lad, for he was as ugly a gentleman as ever was wedded to wife."

After the storm there came that calm which is the inevitable successor, save that, in this case, while the noise subsided, the wonder grew. Every one of Mr. Brummell's company and all of the rest of the world beside, was rehearsing his and her own surmise as to the identity of the young gentleman who had, for above a month, been the town toast, and who had now disappeared as suddenly as he came. Some believed him to be Tom Kidde himself; some, a Lord out of France; some, a Prince of the blood; some, the Devil; some, an astrologer; there was no lack of inventions as to Her Ladyship's identity by the time the ten minutes of Sir Percy's setting had come to an end.

He cast an eye about the place looking for Sir Robin, and his veins were fairly on fire to know the color of his rival's blood and wring from his, he hoped, dying lips, a confession of where Lady Peggy was. Presently, not spying his opponent, he begged Escombe and Chalmers to have the

goodness to seek him out; settle the spot; ask him to choose his seconds; call a surgeon (of whom there were always a score in attendance at Vauxhall, ready for just such affairs), while he himself swung down toward the river to look for Kennaston and give him one last word for Peggy, should Sir Robin run him through.

Peg's twin lay on the turf sleeping. Such are the effects of being at once a poet and a lover, not yet twenty, and quite fagged with wide-awake nights and days and a fair lady's cruel caprices. Sir Percy looked at him, smiled, and whispered as he knelt:

"Dear lad, thou that art My Lady's twin, when next thou seest her, sure I know she'll lay her dear lips on thy brow, and there she'll find, this." Percy kissed the boy as he spoke. "'Tis doubtless more than she'd care to discover, but, if death comes, 'twill ease the blow and charm the pain while I remember this message that I send her now."

He turned away and left Peg's brother lying there to waken at his leisure.

When he reached the Walk again, another clamor greeted him identical with its predecessor.

"Sir Robin McTart! Sir Robin McTart! Sir Robin! Sir Robin! Come forth of your seclusion. The time is up. Sir Robin, I say-y-y-y!"

This Sir Robin McTart had vanished as mysteriously as the other one, and though the entire company made the welkin ring with the same cry over again:

"Sir Robin McTart! Sir Robin! Sir Robin! Sir Robin McTart!" no Sir Robin appeared or could be found, and they were fain be content, reinforced by the ladies now well out of their swoons and terrors, to finish up the night with punch and loo in the boxes, all brains much of a muddle with the strange adventures and miraculous disappearances incident upon Beau Brummell's never-to-be-forgotten masquerade party at Vauxhall.

XVI

Which doth set forth how My Lady Peg, Sir Percy and Sir Robin all put up at the "Queen and Artichoke:" and what a fine hurly-burly thereupon ensues.

The moment that the excitement of the Vicar's identification had subsided, the Baronet, leading the worthy old man to the gates and there quitting him under pretext of fetching a hackney coach, skipped without, and, hiring one with a couple of the horse-patrol at a squeezing price, jumped in and made off for his inn at Pimlico, leaving his whilom preceptor to shift for himself.

Sir Robin had no mind at all for duels with any one, least of all with the resurrected Sir Percy de Bohun, whom his guilty conscience suspected to be

fully cognizant of the author of his attempted assassination. Terrified with all this and, if possible, more so by the accounts he had listened to, right and left, of his valorous and most mysterious name-sake, the little gentleman at once made up his mind as to the course wisest for him to pursue, and forthwith pursued it.

Back to Pimlico, and into bed, shivering betwixt the linen and feathers; up for a toilet of the best and neatest; curling his wig thriftily himself by the fire; a good breakfast; a coach at noon with Kennaston Castle for goal; and himself and his ardent and blissful hopes and beliefs for freight and luggage.

For, not twelve hours since, had not My Lady Peggy's own emissary, the delightful "Mr. Incognito," told him that his mistress was leaving for home last night? Nay, had not Peggy herself, with her own lips, said that she started for Kennaston "ere cock-crow"? and whatever could such words mean but that he, the object of her tenderest solicitude, should follow her at once?

Lady Biddy's bawl, 'tis true, echoed in the Baronet's recollection, but 'twas, to his way of

thinking merely an index of the liveliness of her disposition and the enchanting coyness of her moods.

He adjusted his wig with a beaming smile, snapped his crooked little fingers at the mere memory of Sir Percy de Bohun, the Vicar, his spurious name-sake, and all the rest of it, as he blithely set off on his amorous quest, at high noon, from the Puffled Hen in Pimlico.

That same morning toward dawn, Percy had ridden home alone, leaving Kennaston, cheered by a smile and a pressure of Lady Diana's hand, to return to his chambers in Grub street, whither the young poet had removed some few days since from Lark Lane, at the instance of having had a piece of good fortune, in the way of a commendation from no less a personage than the great Doctor Johnson himself.

The reflections of Peggy's adorer were various and most tormenting; his brain, as he tossed in his bed, was a labyrinth wherein he wandered, vainly endeavoring to solve such riddles as—

"Where was Lady Peggy? Was she indeed the bride of either of the Sir Robins? Who was the

comely young gentlemanly rogue who had for weeks bewitched the fair and charmed the brave? Where had he disappeared? To whom, in reality, was he indebted for the saving of his own life at the Dove Pier; and whose were the St. Giles's hirelings who had near made an end of him there?"

Bewildered and at wits' end, he finally, as the sun was at meridian, sprang from his uneasy couch, rang and rapped thrice for Grigson, made a sorry pretense at conversing on politics with his uncle, whom he presently encountered in the hall; inwardly cursed the old gentleman; and at last, by three o'clock, got his will, which was, astride of the long roan, Grigson on the black, to cross to the Surrey side of the river, and ride as fast as ever he could to Kennaston Castle.

"By heavens!" cried he to himself, pounding Battersea Bridge. "It is time her father knew, and Her Lady mother too, that she is neither in Kent or anywhere else in their reckoning; and if it puts 'em both into their shrouds, they'll hear the truth, and set about solving the riddle before sunrise to-

morrow. I'm sailing on Thursday for the Colonies, but I go not until I am assured of her safety,—and her happiness."

Thus it happened that not above three hours after Sir Robin had started from Pimlico with his destination Kennaston, Sir Percy quitted Charlotte Street with the same beacon in view; and each, the one in his coach, t'other in his saddle, brain full and heart bursting with but one thought, and that Lady Peggy Burgoyne.

Her Ladyship meantime, on landing from the wherry, fairly scampered her way to Mr. Brummell's for fear of desperadoes and Mohocks. At one point wild cries of—

"Watch!" greeted her ears from the open window of a gaming-house; at another a bullet whizzed above her head, the outcome of a duel being fought in a narrow street she traversed. In and out she threaded her path, until presently the pink flush of the dawn pierced the fog into a silvery mist and she had gained the Beau's threshhold. Passing the sleepy servants, Peggy ran up to her room and once again drew the bundle from its hiding

place, tucked the long tail of her dark hair well inside, cast a glance of pitiable amusement about the chamber, and says she, going:

"God knows if I ever get leave to put on a lady's garments again; but I'll never come back here, that's certain, since now am I no one, not even Sir Robin McTart!"

So, challenged merely by the still drowsy footman who asks: "Beg pardon, and with submission, Sir Robin, but will you be home for dinner, Sir, or not until supper?"

"For neither, to-day," answers Her Ladyship, running out into Peter's Court, and then coming to a dead halt.

She drew a long deep breath, as deep as the fog would let her, much as a dog does before he starts on the scent; she jingled the little money left in her purse, gave her hat the cock as she beheld a passer-by, and struck out for London Bridge, which, at this early hour of the day, she found easy enough to cross afoot, barring the filth and mud.

'Twas the first time she had been on it since the memorable afternoon when she and Chockey had

first come up to town in the coach from the Kennaston Arms. Now stalking along with a will, and a swing to her bundle, My Lady had chance to note the tall gaunt houses lining the bridge at each side where the pin-makers dwelt and worked; the gigantic water-wheel under the arches which supplied the town with water; the increasing tide of wagons, carts, pedestrians, porters, whoever else (save the chairs or coaches of fine ladies and gentlemen of which, at this time of day, there were none). Arrived at Surrey side, Her Ladyship paused to consider and, wrapping herself well in her camlet cloak, the which she had used at the masquerade so lately, thereby hiding her blue velvet breeches, laced waistcoat, point ruffles, Mechlin lace cravat, rich coat, and jeweled hilt, soon obtained fare in the one-seated cart of a country clown who was off for Tooting.

Her Ladyship decided very quickly that 'twas but a necessary precaution for her to avoid highways, stage-coaches, and inns of reputation, since probably by this a full description of the supposed Sir Robin would be word of mouth from Westminster to Mile End, and a dozen miles out of

town with the Lord knows but a price set upon his head!

Once arrived at Tooting, 'twas her intention to double on her tracks, return with some bumpkin's load of vegetables to Garret Lane and thence to foot it across country or by penny's-worth rides with village folk, reaching the neighborhood of Kennaston, perhaps late that night; or, if she should be compelled to sleep under some friendly farmer's roof, at least by the next high noon.

But Her Ladyship reckoned, if not without her hosts, most decidedly without taking count of the weary beast that dragged her, nor yet of any possible fellow-guests she might encounter on arriving at the Queen and Artichoke at Tooting.

It was nightfall, when, limp and unnerved, possibly for the very first time in her life conscious of such physical conditions, the clown pulled her up before the inn in order to allow her to alight. Bundle under arm; feet and legs, up to calves, well bespattered with mud from the reek of her passage across London Bridge afoot; wig somewhat tangled for all that she had slipped her wig comb out of pocket and essayed to smooth it a bit; sleeves

upturned, cloak dragging over her arm to heels,—a sorry, disheveled-appearing young personage jumped from among a pile of oat-bags, leathern aprons, chairs, unsold produce, wilted flowers, and under the askant eyes of 'ostler, boots, barmaid, mistress, and host, marched boldly into the parlor of the Queen and Artichoke.

"Was there a chamber to be had?" for Her Ladyship plainly saw she must lie at Tooting and not proceed on her homeward journey until the morrow.

There was a chamber; an admission hesitatingly made, even at this modest hostelry, to a young gentleman arriving without either servant, luggage, box, horse, coach, or dog, and by means of a vile rickety little cart. Yet, such was Her Ladyship's swagger, notwithstanding a full splash of mud on the tip-end of her handsome little chin, she was presently conducted to a decent chamber, up-stairs, at the rear, it is true, yet overlooking the green, where a game of bowls was in progress, and with a fine trellis, thick with vines, beneath its small-paned window.

"Was there an ordinary?"

Oh, the shame and humiliation of it! that the daughter of the Earl of Exham should be put to such an ebb, instead of ordering the best the house afforded sent at once to her room.

Aye, there was an ordinary of two dishes and a pastry at ten-pence, and it would be ready in the quarter hour.

"Ten-pence."

Her Ladyship had just eleven pence ha'penny left in her purse.

Yet, thought she, refreshed by a good meal and the leaving of her weapon as a hostage for her lodging, she would better eat than faint to-night, whatever might betide on the morrow.

While she washed her hands, after hiding the bundle under the feather bed, Her Ladyship heard the ring of horses' hoofs on the stone pave of the inn yard; and her quick ear even detected the fact that one of the steeds went lame.

She peered out of window and beheld Sir Percy astride of his own long roan, with Grigson just dismounting from the smoking black.

"This is cursed luck!" mutters the master, as

he himself, out of saddle, stoops to examine the roan's much swollen off hind-leg.

"It is, Sir Percy," returns the man, "but, by your leave, Sir, it may be we can hire a mount here, although it don't look too promisin'."

"Unlikely," says Sir Percy. "The best we can do is to lie in this hole for the night, and by a hot poultice and a bandage, the roan may be in condition by to-morrow forenoon."

"Very well, Sir; it be a damn poor place of entertainment, Sir Percy, with an ordinary at tenpence, Sir." Grigson's tone of derision is marked by the guest who draws close about her face the cotton curtain of the upper rear chamber window.

"Will you be pleased to be served in your room, Sir Percy, at once, and of whatever can be had? What wine, Sir?"

"Tut, tut, Grigson. I'll into the ordinary; off with you to the stables with the roan, rub her down and medicine her, then to your own supper in the kitchen."

"Host," observes Mr. Grigson, loftily, as that worthy obsequiously appears in the yard with an attendant train, as is customary in welcoming per-

sons of quality, "Sir Percy de Bohun has the condescension to say he will sup in the ordinary, and—"

Whatever Mr. Grigson's further remark may have intended to result in, was, at this crisis, lost to posterity by such a clattering from up on the high road 'round the corner of the green lane, where nestled the Queen and Artichoke, that every eye was turned to behold such a cloud of dust as joyed the soul of Boniface, whose tuned intelligence foresaw a coach and four horses; in the light of which Sir Percy de Bohun's reeking lame roan and ill-kempt aspect faded into almost as much insignificance as had, long since, the traveler who had arrived in the clown's cart.

Boots alone was left to guide Sir Percy to his apartment, while the rest made a concerted dash for the yard entrance, just in time to make their most profound bows and courtesies before the spick little gentleman who thrust his inquiring little head out of window, keeping his door closed, as he beckoned the landlord to him with eager heavy eyes well under cover of his pulled-down hat.

"What guests have you to-night?" asked the little gentleman.

At the very moment he was propounding his query, Sir Percy, now sunk to ignominy even in the eyes of Boots by announcing he would sup at ten-pence, was being ushered into an upper chamber adjoining the very one in which sat, dejected, robbed of even the prospect of food by his presence, Lady Peggy Burgoyne.

"Very few, My Lord," answered the host glibly, "the very best chamber on the first floor with the sitting-room has been kept for Your Lordship," applying hand to latch of coach-door, the which, however, is still firmly held by its occupant.

"Their names?" asks the little gentleman, while at the fleck of one of the postilion's lashes his wheelers begin to prance and advance so far into the yard as that their racket brings Peggy a second time to her narrow pane, a-squinting up her eyes to see who this may be. For, in the midst of her distress, as befalls often enough to all of us, she takes unconscious note of minor happenings, the which, those who study such matters affirm to be proof of the two-sided condition of men's minds.

"Your guests' names?" reiterates the small gentleman, as, followed by the cortège of dame, maid, man, dog, cat, and tame magpie, the coach comes to a halt within excellent range of Her Ladyship's coign of vantage and earshot. "I must know them before I alight."

"Well, My Lord, there's Mr. Bigge, the Curate from Risley Commons, as stops over here on his way to Finchley every week; Mr. Blunt, the traveling tailor; His Grace the Duke of Courtleigh's own man, off on his holiday; Mr. Townes and his new married wife a-goin' to settle in the lodge at the Manor-house; a young spark drabbled with mud and havin' no boxes and no servants, what arrived by means of a market cart just anon, and Sir Percy de Bohun, a fine gentleman what's just ridden in the yard before Your Lordship's coach, but"—

"Who?" The little gentleman turned green in his pallor, and shot back in his cushions with a gasp.

"Not much of any account, My Lord, I'm thinking, since Jenny here tells me he sups at the ordinary; of course Your Lordship'll be served in your

own sitting-room and dame and myself to humbly wait upon you."

"Hold your tongue!" says the little man, gathering his scattered wits and pausing to think, while his steeds paw noisily on the cobble pavement.

Peggy, at the pane, almost laughs as she regards the shrinking weazened visage.

"Sir Robert McTart!" she says to herself, shaking her head at the little vixen. "'Tis indeed a merry fate that puts me and Percy and you all under one roof this night. That is, if his presence don't fright you into a gallop!"

Sir Percy himself, also for a second standing moodily at his casement, could and did behold thence Sir Robin's restive and hungry leaders, and had a passing wonder as to what the devil brought any gentleman to stop at such an inn, save as himself, by the misfortune of a nail in his animal's foot.

Sir Robin, however, with that discretion and prudence, not to say cowardice, which distinguished him, had purposely chosen the Queen and Artichoke, for, upon second thought, he had determined to sleep in comfort.

Sir Robin loved his feathers and quilts of a night far better than the jolt of ruts and ditches, and dreaded highwaymen more than even the pangs of delayed love-making.

By his choice he had hoped to escape the least chance of an encounter with Sir Percy, whom he believed to be in hot pursuit of him, and at this juncture his wise little pate quickly resolved that it were better for him to alight, gain his chamber, and harbor there in safety until such time as that Sir Percy should have unsuspectingly proceeded on his quest.

"If you can ensure me a perfect privacy; to go unseen to my rooms, a fair service, and dry linen, with quiet as to cocks and neighbors, I will remain here for the present," says Sir Robin, almost taking in Lady Peggy by the squint of his uncontrollable left eye.

In a trice, Sir Robin is attended to his bower, and ere long the best in the larder is laid before him. Sir Percy partakes of the homely fare of the ordinary; and Her Ladyship sits, unheeding the tardy summons of the dame, supperless, hungry, fagged, in her tiny room where the warmth

from the kitchen chimney reaches her, and where the goodly smells from Sir Robin's fowls, sausages, eggs, and fruit-pie assail her senses.

Mr. Grigson, doctoring the roan, endeavored with much creditable tact to get wind of the name or title of the master of the coach, but Sir Robin's men had had their lesson, and not a hint was to be got out of either of them by Mr. Grigson, or by the curious host of the Queen and Artichoke himself.

By eleven every candle was out in the house. All the guests, save two, slept the sleep of the presumably just

XVII

Wherein Her Ladyship slips leash of all mankind, runs for her life, and finds goal in the arms of Sir Robin McTart.

These were Peggy and the little Baronet. Her Ladyship, mind made up to flee in the darkness, leaving six-pence on the table to pay for her lodgings, even now stood, latch in hand, bundle once more under arm, still a man, not having dared to change her garments.

Sir Robin lay ensconced betwixt the quilts; the realizing sense that his mortal enemy, one who sought his life, who coveted His Lady—from whom he was running away, to be veracious,—lay not many yards off him, seeming to banish that restful

repose that had seldom hitherto forsaken this worthy and exemplary little person.

A mouse squeaked, and Sir Robin shivered; a beetle pattered across the hearth, his hair stood on end.

Surely a footstep sounded in the hallway; the boards creaked; something metallic struck against the panel of his door, and he sprang from his couch and chattered to his sword.

Lady Peggy's blade had struck the woodwork as she made her way stealthily down in the darkness; while Sir Robin shook, she gained the lower end of the hall but, not being acquainted with its ways and turnings, above all, having forgot the two broad steps that cut the straight road to the entrance in two, Her Ladyship, with much clanking of her weapon on the brick flooring, fell sprawling; her bundle shooting off into the unseen, she up on hands and knees, hither, yon, seeking it; Sir Robin beating on his wainscot such a tattoo as was fit to wake the dead, shrieking, from the safe shelter of the muffling pillows where he huddled:

"Murder! Thieves! Ho there! Landlord! Tom! James! Ho there, I say! Help! Help!"

Sir Percy, out of his four-post up-stairs in a flash, tinder struck, door flung open; in night-rail and cap, with rapier drawn, hanger uplifted, and—

"'Sdeath! What the devil is the matter!" cries he at top of lung. "Speak or I'll fire!" and down the stair he plunges to Sir Robin's very sill.

This one, having successfully summoned those more doughty than himself to cope with the supposed danger, now recognizing Sir Percy's voice, shivers and sweats as he cowers and pulls the counterpane over his head, grasping his purse in his sharp little fingers; wisely never undoing of his door.

"Speak or I'll fire," repeats Sir Percy, whose candle has been blown out by the draught. He takes a few steps down the hallway where he hears the curious scratching noise Her Ladyship is making as she distractedly feels around for the bundle.

At last she grasps it and creeps up unwittingly to Sir Percy's very side; *de facto* her arm grazes his as she now raises herself to a standing posture, exactly as her lover, no answer being vouchsafed him, pulls his trigger and the ball goes a-whizzing

through Sir Robin's door panel and finds lodgement in the chimney bricks.

Peggy, her customary composure being much the worse for hunger and the general excitement, jumps when the shot pops, and thus inadvertently now palpably touches Percy's elbow. He turns upon her and seizes her wrists in a grip of steel; she, as tightly hugging the bundle under her armpit, utters no sound, but wriggles and twists to such a purpose that she is about to get free when her opponent renews his endeavors with an oath.

"Speak!" says he, "or I'll brain you!" making to hold Peg's two hands prisoner in one of his, the while he may seize his rapier and put a finish to the matter.

She does not speak, but to the scene jump now the heavy cumbrous country-folk, rattled out of their deep slumber by Sir Percy's ball and no less by the piercing and prolonged shrieks of Sir Robin, each Colin Clout and Dowsabel of 'em, armed with whatever they could catch; yet, luckily for Her Ladyship, no one of them with sense enough to fetch a candle.

"A light! a light! you damnable idiots!" cried

Sir Percy, while Her Ladyship makes a final twist to free herself, fruitless as before. She feels her ebbing strength at its last pinch and feels, too, the bundle loosening in her hold.

Then, as landlord stumbles to his tinder-box, amid an uproar from all the travelers, especially the new made bride and her spouse, Peggy finds herself let go, nay, almost thrust aside as her captor ejaculates testily:

"Zounds! girl, why did you not proclaim your sex, and not leave me to find it out by a long wisp of woman's hair between my fingers? Lights! Lights! I say! and we'll get the fellow yet! He must be in the house, for no one's left it."

Sir Percy has been for the moment meshed in his Lady's long tresses, which, in the skirmish, have broke leash of the bundle and dangle out yard's length.

For an instant she stands on the landing at bay. To unbolt the big door and make an open dash for freedom would mean certain death; to turn up therefrom and regain her chamber was her sole chance, and this must be done before a light could be struck.

She wheeled around and rushed up the hall, up the stairs among the clustering folk, nudging she knew not whom, skipped along the narrow rear passage, and into her room before candle flames revealed to the amazed company that neither bolt, bar, or latch had been disturbed, nor anything in the house taken!

Even while they rummaged in the bar-room till, counted the forks and spoons—pewter though they were, Her Ladyship, tying the luckless bundle about her waist with a hastily cut bed-cord, cautiously opened the casement, crawled out on the trellis, which unsteadied a bit beneath her weight but did not break; clambered in and out the vines to the edge, and then, lightly, thanks to her twin's training, swung herself to the ground clear, crept across the yard, leaped the stone wall, with a bound and over; flew the width of the meadow; struck the lane, up to the high road; by the moon, took a southerly course which she knew made for Kennaston, and paused not much for breath until she had left a matter of five miles betwixt her and the Queen and Artichoke.

It was coming three o'clock by this, and, all the

little night winds hushed, all the earth and trees and grasses, flowers, shrubs and weeds expectant, vibrant of the nearing dawn, whose pink and beauteous herald now looked over the hill-tops at the east, and put the lingering stars to shame, and woke the little birds, and bade every drop of dew flash on cup and blade; and all the things that breathe to grow and pulsate; to thrill through all their veins with joy that still another day was born.

Her Ladyship too was glad, for, brave as she had been through all the brief ordeal of her manhood, this last adventure had broken her spirit a bit, and hunger and fatigue had sadly weakened her flesh. As the lark mounted, singing to the now risen sun, she struck in a bit from the road and began an endeavor to calculate how far she might be from Kennaston village, or from any place familiar to her. But it was vain to speculate. Peggy, in all her cross-country rides, could not place the spot in which she now found herself.

Food was what she needed most and she came out into the open, shading her eyes with her hand and looking everywhere about for a curl of smoke that might guide her to a cottage. But no friendly

film greeted her, and her hand fell listless at her side.

Hark! The tinkle of a bell, the soft lowing of a cow; not far off either. She ran a piece up the road and presently descried the herd huddling at the pasture bars waiting for their milking, yet no maid nor man in sight, no milking-stool nor pail nor cup, only the soft inviting lowing of the kine. Her bundle still tied about her waist, Her Ladyship let down the top bars, edged through, off with her once splendid but now much tarnished hat, set it under the nearest cow, knelt, and presently had the cock full of as fine foaming milk as one might wish to see. She rose and drank thankfully, rubbing the cow's nose in gratitude; then; amid the concerted cries of the herd, she made off, a little refreshed, still keeping her southerly course; still haphazarding her way, for no house came in sight.

After a matter of a dozen miles, and now reaching the edge of a woods, with the tower of a Castle just sticking up out of the horizon for her only beacon, Peggy halted and, the refreshment of the milk having been by this exhausted, the tears

forced their way to her eyes and even ploughed two small furrows the length of her cheeks, cupping in the dimple of her chin, and splashing at last, on her much rumpled Mechlin lace cravat.

"Bah!" cried she. "I weep only because I am hungry. I am not afraid. Odzooks! She that has had the hemp about her neck to be strung up for a highwayman must not fear to encounter one of her own ilk," and Her Ladyship essays to laugh as she plunges into the wood.

It proves a harmless, peaceful, if somewhat devious neighborhood, where an occasional rabbit scurries over the dry leaves of last autumn's falling, and where a large company of rooks are holding a caucus, but 'tis interminable; and Peggy's legs are not of steel, it seems, but of that lusty flesh and blood and bone which, when made to do duty fasting, now these twenty hours, begin to give out. Her head, too, spins, the knot of her cravat seems to choke her as she loosens it; the weight of the bundle appears like twenty stone at the least about her waist, and she cuts the bed-cord and lets it drop, just for a few moments' ease, she tells herself, as, at last, the other side of the forest

is gained and she beholds a wide stretch of downs and naught but the elusive tower of the distant Castle, appearing farther away even than at first.

What common can this be?

Once again she shades her blood-shot eyes and stares up at the sky. In crossing the woods, she must have struck mistakenly to the west. The sun is nearing the set, and Peggy now knows she has come to Farnham Heath where, report has it, some of the boldest cut-throats in the country rule the roost.

Shall she start to cross it? Kennaston Village lies only ten miles on t'other side of it. That will-o'-the-wisp tower? that castle yonder? yes 'tis home! and she such a dullard as not to have mistrusted it before!

She will push on. Why not? What has she, forsooth, to tempt any thief, unless he took her for ransom.

Well, let him, since Percy de Bohun at this very moment, in all liklihood, kneels at the feet of Lady Diana; if highwaymen want to bear her off, why should she complain? And just then the tinkle of the little brook at the wayside beckons in

Her Ladyship's ear, the Castle tower appears to be dancing up and down against the sky; the two stark trees, yonder on the heath, are surely turning somersaults; the bundle drags all forgotten at her heels, and presently lies in the tall grasses which she threaded on her way to the brook. Her head swam, ten thousand blunderbusses seemed to be firing off inside of it; she pulled off her wig and threw it far from her; she unbuttoned her coat and waistcoat, and drew her cloak in a twist about her; she staggered, caught at an elder; it swayed with her to the water, as she fell swooning with her thirsty lips just in touch of the sparkling bubbles; her wan face shining in the glint of sunshine, the whole round world and all the men and women in it quite forgot, even her sword, unbuckled with the bed-cord, now lay glinting its jewels in the sedges half a dozen rods away.

A pair of robins eyed her from the bushes, a bee swerved and swung above her mouth; the minnows darted next her cheek, but My Lady did not wake for any or all of these. She lay there motionless until the sun had gone down and all the sweet

scents and drowsy sounds and whirrs and flutters of twilight had come up; until a fine coach with four horses and two postilions came prancing and pawing at a great rate of speed out of the wood to the heath. Until a little weazened fine gentleman, who had dozed in his bed until long past noon for fear of encountering a certain other gentleman, had risen leisurely, dined with relish, set out from the Queen and Artichoke only after being assured that the other gentleman had gone off on a ruined horse back to Garratt Lane in the hopes of obtaining a suitable mount, which same was not to be had short of the ten mile return; until the little gentleman, then, thrusting his face out of his coach window as the vehicle came to a sudden standstill, spoke:

"Is this the heath?" he asks with blinking eyes and a shiver.

"Yes, Sir Robin, Farnham Heath, Sir!" answers one of the postilions.

"Your pleasure, Sir Robin?" asks the second man respectfully, quieting his horses.

"Well," returns the little Baronet, "if you think

we can gallop across faster than those devils could overtake us, I say, proceed. If not—" he glances back over his shoulder.

To tell the truth, the gentleman from Kent considered himself as betwixt two very impending fires, and, 'tis safe to say, he dreaded Sir Percy de Bohun's possibility at his back as much, if not more, than he did the robbers in front of him.

"We're in the best condition, Sir," returned the man, "and fifty minutes ought to take us out of all chances of danger."

"Unless," replies the master, again casting an apprehensive eye to the rear, "they might close in on us from behind."

"No fear, Sir," cries the lackey, "our pistols are loaded and cocked; with your own rapier, pistols and the blunderbuss, Sir Robin, we should—"

"What's that?" exclaims the second man, eyes bulging, as with the handle of his whip he points to the fallen figure by the brookside.

"Zounds!" cries the first, rising in his seat to peer.

"'Sdeath! Damnation!" squeaks Sir Robin, pulling down the coach-sash. "On with ye, you

devils! On, I say!" thumping impatiently on the pane with his signet ring.

"No fear, Sir, no fear, Sir Robin!" exclaims the second man, jumping to the ground and inspecting Her Ladyship. "It's only a corp."

"Are you sure?" opening the door cautiously. "Sure?"

"Aye, Sir Robin, a quality corp, Sir. Mayhap shot down by them vagabones out of the heath. Had I best see if there's any life left in the young gentleman, Sir?"

Sir Robin descends from his coach, a pistol in one hand, a drawn rapier in the other.

"Keep an eye on the lookout, James," he whispers to the postilion who remains in his seat, and the Baronet minces in and out of the tall grasses, shaking the dew daintily from his sprawling feet, until he gains the spot, where his man kneels above the prostrate form.

"Ugh!" says he, turning aside his head in a species of disgust, "I never could abide the sight of the dead."

'Twas the very first time in his life he'd ever had a chance to behold such!

"He ain't quite cold yet, Sir Robin," says the postilion. "There's a flicker to his eye-lids, Sir, look!"

The Baronet looks; out of his hands tumble rapier and pistol.

"'Slife!" he cries, down on his knees, feeling at Her Ladyship's pulse, pulling his flask from his pocket and trying vainly to pour the liquor between the firmly shut lips.

As he tries, the little gentleman's wits work nimbly, which they could do on occasions, and, not stopping even to wonder at his discovery, only to accept instantly as a fact that his Lady had been struck down while pursuing him, he is so overjoyed at the beauty, sentiment, and opportuneness of the adventure, as to be scarce able to restrain his elation, even in the face of a serious swoon.

"Into the coach at once, James," he says, raising Her Ladyship's head himself, "your gentlest endeavors and a guinea apiece to you," nodding to the other, as between them they carry the limp form to the coach, "if you bring me to Kennaston Castle before curfew."

"Never fear, Sir Robin; if the young gentleman

only holds out for a single hour, I swear, Sir, in the teeth of all the highwaymen in the kingdom, we'll have you there."

"Tut, tut," says Sir Robin, smiling, no longer restraining an expression of his happiness and triumph, as he makes ready the rugs and cushions within to receive the burden James, for the moment, bears alone.

" 'Tis no young gentleman, you rogues, 'tis My Lady Peggy Burgoyne, my bride that is to be. Wait a moment, Thomas, while I spread this shawl; and James, look you sharp behind us, for there's a gentleman in pursuit of this Lady would kill me on sight if he can."

XVIII

In the which Sir Percy steals a coach and four and the living contents thereof and makes off therewith at breakneck speed for life and death.

At this very moment, two horsemen, sorry mounted enough, especially the master, are rounding the turn of the woodland path and about to emerge upon the open next the heath. He who rides the lame roan has his eyes bent upon the ground, a thousand sad and conflicting thoughts crowding his brain, as 'tis impossible even to urge his hurt steed, and a jog-trot is all that can be got out of her ever again. Garratt Lane had sent him away only with his own again.

"Sir Percy, with submission, Sir," exclaims

Grigson, "this be Farnham Heath, Sir, and, 'pon my life, Sir!" jumping from his saddle and darting to the grassy side of the way, "a rapier, Sir Percy!" picking it up and dragging with it the straggling bed-cord and its appending bundle.

Percy leaped to the ground and seized the weapon.

"Grigson!" cried he, "there's been foul work hereabouts. This is the sword of a gentleman I know, or my name's not Percy de Bohun! He is a scurvy fellow, and my enemy, but if he has fallen among thieves, by the heaven above us! I'll rescue him, even if 'tis to punish him later according to my own will. Take the rapier."

As he hands it back to his man, the bed-cord from the Queen and Artichoke, being a full century old, gives entirely away and My Lady Peggy's duds, long tail of dark hair, pins, needles, whatever else beside, fall, scatter, topsy-turvy to the ground, and at the very same moment Percy sees before him, as in a nest among the sedges and ferns of the marshy brookland, the wig that Her Ladyship had flung off, and a scrap of tumbled paper addressed to himself, flapping, spiked on a thistle-

top, near it! Thunderstruck, he is about to read it, when Grigson, who has gone on afoot a few steps, starts back, and, reckless of all things, seizes his master's arm and drags him to the turn of the road.

"Sir Percy! Hist! For the love of God, Sir, look!"

Thrusting the bit of paper into his waistcoat, Percy gasps and gazes. He beholds Sir Robin and his man lifting a limp and slender form, ill-defined, 'tis true, in its swathe of camlet cloak, into the coach; he beholds a head of dark short hair, a face of ashen pallor, and, in two seconds more, before he can rush back and leap into his saddle, motioning Grigson to do the same, the coach containing Sir Robin and his prize is dashing as fast as whip, spur, sixteen thoroughbred legs, and a backing-up of wholesome terror can urge it, over the bleak and gruesome waste of Farnham Heath!

"'Slife! Grigson, man," cries Percy, digging steel into the poor roan's flanks till they spurt blood in a stream. "We must overtake 'em, unhorse 'em, spill out the wretch inside; I'll into the

coach then to protect the lady, you mount the leader and gallop us over the heath for your life!"

"Trust me, Sir Percy," answers Grigson from a length behind his master. "God grant, Sir, that the roan drop not out of the race and leave us but one saddle betwixt you and me, Sir."

"Poor beast," says Percy, pricking her hard and striking her shoulder with the flat of his rapier. "She'll die, and in a good cause if she gain me the goal."

And all the while they're speaking, flash and crack go the whips of Sir Robin's postilions, and Sir Robin's splendid beasts cover the ground with a swing and a will that keeps the coach rocking, but yet awakens not Lady Peggy, whose dark cropped head reposes on the crooked shoulder of Sir Robin, while her white eyelids remain sealed and no quiver of returning consciousness thrills about her drawn and bloodless lips.

"Gad!" exclaims Percy, as he beholds the vehicle swinging and spinning farther and farther from him, and as Grigson's black now is up nose and nose with his own expiring mare. "Gad, girl," bending his lips to the roan's laid-back ear, "go

on! help me to save her! to reach her; go on, I say, in God's name!"

As if the faithful creature comprehended her master's entreaty, with that not uncommon last flash of superhuman strength that inheres in man and beast alike, the roan raised her fine head in the air, pricked her ears, stretched out her neck, gathered herself up with a twitch of her nerves that thrilled to her rider's heart, and off! as in her best days, when she could distance the fleetest mount in the county; off, with the whirl and whirr of those coach-wheels beckoning to her; off, with that pair of straining eyes, those parted lips, blessing her as she began to gain on Sir Robin,—began to? nay, 'twas all a matter of beginning and ending in a breath. Before the postilions, amid their own clatter and calling, had caught hint of the pursuit, the roan was up with the windows out of which the apprehensive little Baronet was peering; his scream of terror:

"Highwaymen! Faster! On! lads, on! A hundred pounds if we outrun 'em! On!" was their first advertisement of danger.

But while the two were drawing their hangers

from their belts, Sir Percy, with a swerving dash, pulled the roan on her hind legs directly in front of the galloping leaders. 'Twas but an interposition of Providence (coupled with very excellent cool-headed horsemanship) that he was not then and there dispatched into the hereafter.

The leaders plunged, grinding the wheelers with their hind hoofs; the wheelers fell back of a heap, smashing in the fine front glass and cutting Sir Robin across the lip, but not so much as waking his burden from her deathlike sleep.

"Down with ye!" cries Sir Percy, a pistol in each hand, as Grigson rides up with another brace to reinforce his master, putting a hand as well to the quieting of the coach horses.

"Aye, aye, Sir! but spare our lives and we'll do your bidding!" cry Sir Robin's lackeys, leaping to the ground.

"We've not a groat betwixt us, Your Honor, on our life!"

"I want no groats nor guineas either!" says Percy, now leaving his man to cover the steeds and the postilions, while he jumps off the roan's back and springs to the side of the coach.

To wrest the door from the feeble clutch of the shrieking little gentleman from Kent; to open it; seize him, stopping his frantic and craven cries with a thrust of a pocket napkin in his mouth; to haul him out and send him spinning over the turf with his gold and silver scattering from purse and pockets, is, with Sir Percy, the work of a very few seconds.

"Mercy! Mercy! Mr. Highwayman!" whimpers the Baronet, cringing on his knees, as Grigson lifts himself up on the off leader's back and Percy props the swooning figure within the coach.

"'Slife, Sir, whoever you are! Raise your eyes! I am Sir Percy de Bohun, at your service any time three hours hence."

Sir Robin glances up, his crooked little legs now bowing more into an arc than before, as he hears the dread name of his rival.

Clapping hand to hilt, however, he stands up.

"Sir," says he, pushed into a valiance he has no smallest sympathy with, solely from fear that Lady Peggy may have open ears by this time. "Sir, that Lady is my affianced. I command you, quit her and leave us to pursue our journey in peace.

D'ye hear, Sir?" Sir Robin brandishes his weapon, now reinforced by the approach of his servants. "I'll stick you where you stand, Sir!" shouts McTart, prancing a bit nearer and actually touching Percy's shoulder with the point of his weapon,—be it remembered de Bohun's back was toward him as he leaned into the coach arranging the cushions.

"Will you!" says Sir Percy, coolly turning and seizing the little man's blade and administering therewith to its owner a smart box on his out-flapping ears. "Had I time to waste," adds Percy, now jumping into the coach, "I'd leave your carcass here. Put up your pistol, Sir," says he, aiming his own straight at Sir Robin's now un-wigged pate, "or, damn you! you'll be cold inside a second. On with you, Grigson," calls master to man. "Life and death are in this matter. If the four beasts, and you, too, drop at the finish, get us to Kennaston faster than the wind travels."

Even while he speaks, he watches the still white face so near him with his finger on his trigger, Sir Robin discreetly backing away and rending the air with noisy and impotent curses; then a plunge, a

long, resounding call from Grigson; the two lackeys agog at finding themselves alive, Sir Robin's coach starts on as if the very devil himself were in its wake.

Percy does not draw Peggy to him; he lays her back among the pillows; he bathes her head and lips and hands with liquor from his flask; he holds the slender fingers in his palm, as, amid awful terror lest his Lady die, he is racked with consternation and wonder at the present outcome, and in his distraught mind endeavors to patch and piece out the strange network of the mystery now beginning to solve itself before his eyes.

As he prays God to spare her, if not for him, for some better man, a shrill, weird sound smites his ear.

Percy throws back his head and listens; 'tis the long roan neighing for the last time back on Farnham Heath, where Sir Robin, picking up his money, dejectedly shivering like an aspen (since he would rake hell with a nail to secure a ha'penny, and fairly weeps at the six-pences he can't recover), presently and ruefully, one of his men behind him, pillion fashion, t'other running at his side,

turns back to Tooting on top of Grigson's black, his fox teeth chattering in his wide mouth as he congratulates himself on his second and miraculous escape from the famous Sir Percy de Bohun.

'Twas, in sooth, for this latter a bitterly sad hour which was spent in covering the distance between the heath and the Castle. Revived a bit, no doubt by the fumes of the liquor, Her Ladyship's lids quivered, contracted, and finally opened, but it was with a distraught and unrecognizing stare that she surveyed her companion.

"'S death!" cries she aloud, her feeble right hand seeking her sword-side, "I tell ye, Chock, your mistress is now full-fledged a man! Hist, girl, an you love me, keep it close. Sir Percy's wed to Lady Diana! Aye!" Peggy laughs with such a heart-break in her voice and such tears in her winkers as causes Percy a pang of cruelest misery.

"Tut, tut, Chock! What's his marriage to me? Fetch the pack, Mr. Brummell; aye, I'm at your service, loo, crimp, or whist! I, Sir Robin McTart, 'll lay you a thousand to nothing! Zounds! Sir, fetch coffee to stain my face with! and where,

oh, where's my precious bundle with my woman's duds in't, my patch-box that I burned, and the long tail of my hair I cut off when you, Chock, bought me the counterfeit of Sir Robin's own wig at the perruquier's in Lark Lane. Aye! So!—No! No! No!" and now a shiver and a lower tone, as Lady Peggy, with her wide wild eyes, shrank back in the far corner of the jolting coach.

"My Lady Mother,—I command you, Chock, tell her not of my escapades; and when Percy comes home with his bride, swear him, as will I, I was off pleasuring in Kent at my godmother's. Mother! Mother!" cries she, piteously now, as Percy's arms enfold her, and a thousand fond words jostle each other on his lips.

Then she sinks into the stupor again, and remains so until the great coach rolls through the park and up to the entrance of her home; until Percy, with few words, lays her in the stout arms of the faithful Chockey and sees her mother bending above her; her father distract in his night-rail and cap; cook wailing, being from Kerry and prompt at any sort of hubbub; Bickers' toothless mouth agape with groans; sees his Lady carried

mend; notes, and flowers and fruits, and game and fish to tempt her appetite; a little dog from Pomerania; a Persian boy to wait upon her whims; a mare, as white as milk; sweetmeats from the Indies; damasks from China and France; shells and curious beadwork slippers from the American Colonies—whither, it is needless to say, a certain good ship had sailed, leaving a certain young gentleman behind—all these things, and many more besides, were offered up at Her Ladyship's shrine, but never yet had she been able to bring herself to scribble one line to her suitor, or to send any message, save polite civilities by Chockey.

'Twas only after the buxom damsel (having the night previous heard from Grigson that his master was like to die of suspense, and having imparted the same to Her Ladyship), together with the Lady Mother and the Earl, had argued and preached into her the great and chivalrous devotion of Sir Percy, that Peggy at last had brought her mind into a condition of acquiescing in his coming up to her morning-room on the Thursday (being St. James's Day) after the sixth Sunday after Trinity; which same she carefully marked in her

prayer-book with a dab of the crimson her mother sent in to beautify her pale cheeks with, against Sir Percy's advent.

"Oh, slitterkins! Madam," cries the Abigail under her breath, "and asking Your Ladyship's pardon, but how can I do up Your Ladyship's hair an' it no longer than the peltry of a meadow-mouse!"

"True enough, Jane Chockey," replies her mistress, contemplating her countenance in the mirror. "Of a fact, I resemble nothing so much as one of those weazen little vermin; my nose is sharp, too, and my cheeks—"

"Stay, My Lady," says Chock, taking up the rouge, and putting on layer after layer. "Who'll say Your Ladyship ain't handsome now? Lawk, Madam! You look like an angel! What a blessing of Providence the French is with their nostrums!"

Peggy regards herself.

"Now, My Lady," cries Chockey, "would you but borrow your Lady Mother's worked head, a cup of powder, and Her Ladyship's pink feathers

atop of it! What a sight would you be for Sir Percy to behold!"

Peggy shakes her head. The three feet of wire, wool, pommade, frizz and plumage the hand-maiden suggests, even causes her to laugh aloud as she figures it above her own face.

"Nay, Chock, none o' that!" says she, "I'll do as I am. Sir Percy has seen my cropped head; faith, he 'twas, you tell me, that fetched the tail of my locks to Kennaston in his saddle-pocket, or tied upon him somewhere?"

"Aye, My Lady, Mr. Grigson says never, since Adam and Eve began courtin' under the fig-tree, has any young nobleman been seen in such a frenzy as Sir Percy about Your Ladyship. Lawk, Lady Peggy! When a young gentleman goes off his feed, ceases swearin' and cursin' his man, and stops down in the country nigh three months in the season, a-readin' loud to his deaf aunt, there ain't no sort of doubt as to the quality of his passion!"

Her Ladyship smiles as she spreads her train and glances at it over her shoulder.

"Chock," says she, "look you, now, while I cross

the room; does the paduasoy stand out well over my hoop?"

"Like the dish-clout, My Lady, when I spreads it to dry over one of the biggest hen-coops. 'Tis monstrous fine, finer, I should swear, than anything Lady Diana could have!" Chockey sighs, lost in admiration. "Though belike Lord Kennaston wouldn't think so."

"And, Chock, look again." Her Ladyship crosses back to the divan. "'Tis thus the town ladies give the true quality sweep to their trains. Give me the trinket Sir Percy sent me last night." Peggy takes a fan of most beautiful feathers from a mother-of-pearl box and waves it back and forth. "'Tis so, Chock, the London fine ladies flutter the fan, as 'tis called, and every wriggle hath a different meaning!"

"Oh!" Chockey is well-nigh speechless as she watches her mistress sidling, bridling, agitating the fan back, forth, hither, and yon. "Madam, 'tis amazin' grand! A glass of port now, My Lady, as by the orders of the surgeons?"

"Nay," says Peggy, "I ain't in need of such."

"A mug of ale? cider? milk?"

"I'll none of 'em, Chock," returns Her Ladyship, seating herself on the divan, and spreading out the paduasoy as 'twere a tail and she the peacock owning it.

"Set my *étui* beside me on the stand; place that large chair far off yonder by the window for Sir Percy, that he may not disturb my furbelows, and—"

"Hark, Madam! Hoofs!"

"Lud!" cries Her Ladyship, "his new horse's hoofs! I've learned the ring of 'em as well as I once knew that of the poor long roan." Peggy sighs; she has heard much during her convalescence by way of Mr. Grigson and the Abigail.

"Go you down, Chock, and, after a suitable period of waiting,—I mean such decent few minutes," cries she after the girl, "as may be occupied in dutiful greetings to Dad and Her Ladyship, you may send Sir Percy up to see me."

She hears his voice in the hall greeting her father and mother; she glances over at the mirror, and, snatching her pocket-napkin from her bag, Peggy tips it to the top of the essence-bottle and rubs the red from her cheeks; she flings the fan

down, draws in her splendid train to a crumpled heap about her, gives the hoop as smart a thrust as her feeble strength will permit, hears a footstep, and promptly buries her shamed face in the cushions of the divan.

She does not answer the light rap on the half-open door, nor does her lover wait; he enters, and in a second, kneeling at her feet, his two arms about her, he raises her sweet face and lays his yearning lips on Her Ladyship's own beautiful mouth.

"Ah, Peggy, my adored one," says he, devouring her pale face with his happy eyes, stroking her cropped head with caressing fingers.

"Oh, Percy!" says she, with real roses blooming in her cheeks.

"I know a deal," whispers he, "but one thing I must ask. You'll tell me at once, will you?"

"What is't?" says she, smiling, as she leaves her two hands in the hold of one of his.

"Why did you adventure so much? for what, for whom, whose sake? Wherefore?" The young man's voice is feverish with anxiety.

She hangs her head; raises it proudly; wishes

"Ah, Peggy, my adored one," says he, devouring her pale face with his happy eyes.

[illegible] there on her pillow, in a tangled [illegible] about her, gives [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

she had him at a distance, and so, leave to swing her train and use her fan indifferent.

"My beloved," cries he, "answer me! 'Tis your own Percy, him that worships the ground you tread upon; who has never had a thought apart from you; to whom every other lady on God's earth's but a puppet—that asks—eh, Peg, for whom, who?" coaxes he with eyes, lips, hands, heart-beats.

"For your sake, Sir, and none other," she answers. "'Twas because I knew I'd done wrong and sent you from me careless; I would not give in; but, you up in town, Ken writin' me as he did—I could abide it no longer—and I went."

"Now the God above us, bless you," says he, taking her in his arms, and at the same instant pulling from his waistcoat pocket the scrap of a note she'd written him in the eye of the scaffold.

"Peg, Peg! I'm not worthy to mate with you, and when I learned of all your hairbreadth 'scapes, your twice saving of my life—when I read this, 'slife! My Lady, what's a man like me to such as you!"

"I'll tell you," says she, laying her head on his shoulder, "he's the man she loves."

"Will you marry me in a fortnight, Peggy?" asks he, rapturous.

"Nay!" answers she, laughing. "I've another suitor to consider, Sir."

"And who is he?"

"Sir Robin McTart! He was over yesterday to ask my hand from Daddy."

"The devil!"

"Nay, Sir, not enough courage for that!"

"Peggy, sweetlips, will you be mine the Tuesday after Transfiguration?"

"Lud! No, Sir Percy! that will I not!"

"When will you, then, love?"

"Next Christmas."

"Split it," cries he, imploringly, "make it the first quarter of the October moon?"

"Well," she answers, looking up to where her father and mother stand in the doorway, "an Daddy and my Lady Mother consent, you shall have your way, Sir."

The young man glances up, following Peggy's eyes, springs to his feet, raises her from the old divan and leads her before them.

"My Lord and Your Ladyship," says he, "will

you consent, as Peggy has, to our being made man and wife on October the fifth? and will you give My Lady and my unworthy self your blessing?"

They kneel down and the Earl puts out his hands above their heads; the words stumble, for there are drops in his old eyes, as he looks and beholds about their faces that most splendid of all aureoles, the light of love and faith, honor with youth, and hope and wholesome minds to guide.